

CASE STUDY: MIDDLE SCHOOL CONTENT TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH
SUPPORTING SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF ELLS

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Vanessa Paladino

July 15, 2022

I dedicate this work to my mom, Cheryl Paladino.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study aimed to explore current perceptions of middle school content teachers and their abilities to effectively meet the educational needs of the students in their classrooms whose first language is not English. In addition, this study provided qualitative data to help identify the strategies used by middle school content teachers and the support they receive from schools in preparing to provide equitable instructional opportunities to English language learners (ELLs) compared to their native English-speaking peers. Participants included 10 middle school content teachers in Tennessee. All participants completed a survey consisting of both closed- and open-ended response questions. Analysis of responses submitted by participants indicated that many teachers are tasked with the responsibility to instruct ELLs in their classroom without having received much if any, related formal training, teachers need additional and ongoing access to support, training, and resources, and teachers of ELLs would benefit from increased opportunities for collaboration amongst content and ESL teachers. Based on the findings of the study, there are several practical implications for practice, research, and policy including that schools provide ongoing opportunities for professional development, the need to replicate the study with a larger sample group or in a different state to determine if similar results are produced, and urging the U.S. Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights to develop more specific guidelines for schools to follow in regard to implementation of effective ESL programs.

Keywords: English as a second language (ESL), English language learner (ELL), teaching, instruction, second language acquisition (SLA), middle school

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Chapter I

Introduction

The issue concerning whether students have equal access to education no matter their race, color, or national origin was first validated as an issue by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020a). This legislation marks the first of many battles regarding equality issues in public education that continue to this day. This is relevant to English language learners (ELLs) and their education experience in the United States because they often face challenges when entering schools with limited proficiency in English. These challenges were well represented in the class-action lawsuit, *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974. In this case, Chinese students fought for recognition that identical education to native English speakers did not mean that it was equal. This case is significant in examining the educational opportunities for ELLs because it led to precedence from the Supreme Court that schools must make a conscious effort to eliminate systemic barriers faced by non-English speaking students.

Since the *Lau v. Nichols* case in 1974, there has been increased awareness of the need to equitably meet the needs of ESL students. However, there continues to be a lack of direct and specific guidance from the federal government. As of today, the U.S. Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights (2020b) do not

require or advocate a particular program of instruction for ELL students and nothing in federal law requires one form of instruction over another. Under federal law, programs to educate children with limited proficiency in English must be: (1) based on a sound educational theory; (2) adequately supported so that the program has a realistic chance of success; and (3) periodically evaluated and revised, if necessary (para. 4).

These requirements lack specificity and leave much room for interpretation and liberty to

individual states and school districts in their creation of English as a second language (ESL) programs. This is an indication that there may be vast differences in the way schools approach ESL instruction across the United States, which leads to different experiences and perceptions amongst teachers based on where they gained their teaching experience.

Nonetheless, students from all over the world continue to emigrate to the United States, and schools around the country are met with the task of providing instructional programs to aid students in their acquisition of English while identifying and eliminating barriers that they may face as non-English speakers (de Jong et al., 2018). Most teacher training programs do not specifically teach ESL courses unless the student is enrolled in an additional endorsement program, therefore content teachers in the classroom are left with minimal experience and knowledge of effective ESL teaching strategies (Irby et al., 2018). It is important to build on the body of literature and further explore the teaching strategies and perceptions of middle school content teachers who work with ELLs. By gaining more insight into their teaching strategies and perceptions, schools will be better equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to assist ELLs in improving basic communication skills as well as academic language proficiency.

Time constraints often plague the school environment, which inhibits the ability of content teachers to spend time collaborating, especially with colleagues who do not share the same schedule. McGriff and Protacio (2015) explain in their research on the placement of ESL teachers in middle schools that the role of the ESL teacher plays a critical role in ensuring that ELLs are supported by the entire school. However, ESL teachers are often tasked with caseloads that require them to be in multiple school buildings in a single day and insufficient time to spend time collaborating with content teachers. Previous research indicates that exposure to English alone does not ensure acquisition, so teachers must be informed about resources and strategies

that can be used in the classroom and the best method is through establishing time for collaboration between content and ESL teachers (López, 2010). In addition, it is necessary to determine and analyze the perception that content teachers have on their effectiveness based on resources being provided by the school meant to support ELLs as it has been found that these materials are often an afterthought or neglected when districts plan for and purchase resources for the many academic programs being offered in school buildings (Loewus, 2021).

Problem of Practice

There are a variety of course offerings available to students seeking degrees in education. However, most teacher preparation programs do not require ESL-specific courses for graduation and teacher certification (de Jong et al., 2018). Typically, those seeking to better understand how to effectively instruct ELLs must add an endorsement to their program of study and teacher certification, which may deter students from agreeing to additional coursework and costs. The lack of opportunities for teachers to become informed on ESL best practices indicates that there may be a deficit in preparedness amongst mainstream classroom teachers in their ability to provide equitable instruction to ELLs (Bartone, 2020; de Jong et al., 2018; Hansen-Thomas, 2008; Loewus, 2021; Irby et al., 2018; Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014; Von Esch & Kavanaugh, 2018). ELLs are arriving in classrooms at a rapid pace, but content area middle school teachers may not be prepared to provide them equitable instruction in comparison to their native English-speaking peers.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the teaching strategies used by middle school content teachers to support English language learners. In addition, it sought to examine middle school content teachers' perceptions of their ability to effectively teach English language learners and the support they received from their schools.

Research Questions (RQs)

RQ1: What teaching strategies are middle school content teachers using to support English language learners?

RQ2: How do middle school content teachers perceive their ability to effectively teach English language learners?

RQ3: What support do middle school content teachers receive from schools to support the instruction of English language learners?

Overview of Methodology

The case study method research design used qualitative data collected from an electronic survey consisting of open-ended, Likert scale, and multiple-select items completed by Tennessee middle school content teachers (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Böckenholt, 2017). The researcher collected and organized the data submitted by teachers to then compare and determine consistencies and analyze findings. Descriptive methods were used because of the study's connections to real-life issues and for the purpose of reporting the feedback from teachers based on their experiences in the classroom. Gathering qualitative data in the format of independent, open-ended surveys allowed the researcher to interpret and analyze responses throughout the study as responses were submitted.

Significance of the Study

Populations of ELLs continue to grow and expand throughout the United States. This supports the need for increased awareness of the implications this has on current instructional practices and teacher preparation methods used to ensure all student needs are met (de Jong et al., 2018; Harrison & Larkin, 2018; Irby et al., 2018). This study contributed to the body of research that examines the perceived effectiveness of instruction in middle school content classrooms for ELLs. The study described the perception of current middle school teachers and informed on their understanding of effective second language acquisition (SLA) strategies and the fidelity of SLA-specific resources that they have access to use in their classroom with ELLs. In addition, the study hoped to provide a framework for potential professional development opportunities and planned support for content teachers who teach ELLs in the future based on expressed needs through their survey responses.

Many studies related to equitable instruction for ELLs in the United States are focused on providing data related to effective learning strategies for SLA and the experiences of teachers in ESL teaching positions (Harrison & Larkin, 2018; McGriff & Protacio, 2015; Slater & Mohan, 2010). While these topics of study are critical for the improvement of ESL practices in schools, there is a necessity to investigate the perceptions and understandings of teachers currently in content classrooms across the United States who are being asked to meet the needs of ELLs with potentially limited education in doing so effectively. This study aimed to gather feedback on their experiences in preparing to teach ELLs and their perceptions of effectiveness based on that experience and student outcomes.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. **English as a Second Language (ESL):** “A program of techniques, methodology and special curriculum designed to teach ELL students English language skills, which may include listening, speaking, reading, writing, study skills, content vocabulary, and cultural orientation. ESL instruction is usually in English with little use of native language” (U.S. Department of Education (ED), 2020a, para. 7).
2. **English Language Learner (ELL):** “A national-origin-minority student who is limited-English-proficient. This term is often preferred over limited-English-proficient (LEP) as it highlights accomplishments rather than deficits” (ED, 2020a, para. 6).
3. **Individualized Learning Plan (ILP):** “a document that describes the academic and language needs of, and goals for, an English language learner (ELL). An ILP details the strategies, accommodations, and goals to be implemented daily in the classroom in order to help ELLs be successful” (TN Department of Education, 2018, para.1).
4. **Second Language Acquisition (SLA):** a process by which an individual learns a new language different from their native, or first language (VanPatten et al., 2020).
5. **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD):** “The activity whereby individuals and groups, interacting under the systematic and planned (e.g., schooling), or unsystematic and unplanned, mediation (see Mediation) of other individuals and groups take part in tasks that they cannot perform alone and at the same time appropriate the cultural artifacts available in their community” (VanPatten et al., 2020, p. 300).

6. **Universal Grammar (UG):** “A system of linguistic principles and parameters, placing limitations on the form of grammars. UG is assumed to be part of a biologically endowed language faculty (i.e., innate). Principles of UG are invariable across languages, whereas parameters allow for constrained variation from language to language” (VanPatten et al., 2020, p. 299).

Chapter II

Review of Literature

To guide this study, a review of academic literature related to theories of SLA, ESL best practices, and perceptions of teachers in classrooms that include ELLs was conducted. This chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical frameworks and theories that play a role in determining how instructional approaches are developed to help people acquire a second language. Then, the chapter will review the roles of teachers and administrators in schools that serve ELLs and how their perception of what practices are best suited for effective ESL instruction. Next, the chapter will discuss the experiences of ELLs in schools in the United States. To finish, this chapter will review the importance of vocabulary instruction for ELLs, as well as, research-based instructional strategies and resources that can be used by teachers in the classroom to specifically help students through the process of SLA.

Theoretical Framework

Numerous theories have been developed to explain and predict the process of SLA. Amongst all of the developing research, several observations remain constant in being necessary for the acquisition of a second language (i.e., L2) to occur (VanPatten et al., 2020). One of the key observations that are consistent amongst theories on SLA is that exposure to input, or language that the learner is tasked to comprehend during communication with others, is necessary for SLA to occur. For the purpose of this study, research will focus on the acquisition of English as a second language. In a school setting, ELLs are regularly exposed to input and find themselves participating in situations that require them to attempt to interpret and comprehend to be able to understand the task. However, another key observation garnered from SLA theoretical research is that L2 acquisition has limitations when it comes to acquisition

through classroom instruction. Based on these two observations, it is important to review past research to determine how schools can best serve the needs of ELLs throughout the process of SLA.

Sociocultural Theory

The concept of sociocultural theory was developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky and has been used as a foundation for researching and understanding the impact of environments on child development. Danashfar and Moharami (2018) explained that this theory relies on the understanding that “children are immersed in a social environment where it represents them with all social, cultural, and interpersonal experiences. The engagement in cultural connections proves the influential impact of social environment as a key source of development” (p. 600). This theory is specifically relevant to the development of ELLs because they often have experiences with more than one cultural community. Recognizing the significant impact of culture on development is essential for teachers who work with ELLs. By implementing resources and activities that address cultural differences among the student population, teachers are enhancing the learning experience for ELLs (Bartone, 2020).

Embedded in sociocultural theory is the concept of scaffolding according to a student’s zone of proximal development (ZPD; Mahn, 1999). This means that there is a contrast between skills that children are able to do alone versus with the help of somebody more skilled in the given area. This applies to ELLs in SLA because a teacher must understand both the cultural implications on development and the range of activities that are accessible at the time of instruction. An adult or higher-level peer can be beneficial to this process in that they can help provide clarification throughout learning and determine if the instructional materials being used are comprehensible to the ELL or if further guidance is necessary. This process ensures that the

learning environment is conducive to regular opportunities for discussion.

Universal Grammar

Once students enter upper elementary grades, English classes become much more dedicated to literature, culture, and reflection. The acquisition portions of instruction become much more minimal if at all existent (VanPatten et al., 2020). Theories in SLA acknowledge that acquiring a second language is too abstract to be taught like other content areas and therefore must be approached differently. White (2003) discusses this concept and a theory for SLA reliant on the universal grammar framework (UG). The theory of UG relies on the principle that all human languages are innate and thus naturally acquired over time. As children develop, under the concept of UG, features of language do not have to be explicitly taught. This concept questions the role of instruction on SLA because it brings into question which aspects of language learning need to be explicitly taught. Perhaps, the emphasis should be on the input being provided through effective instruction that lends itself to the natural processes of SLA under the theory of UG.

Functional Approaches

Aside from UG, theories in L2 acquisition typically fall under one of two categories: functional or usage-based. Functional approaches to L2 acquisition rely on the concept that without communication, language would not exist and can be either form-oriented or concept-oriented (VanPatten et al., 2020). This theory focuses on form and function as the foundation for SLA. The form, or meaning, and function of any language are interdependent on one another and thus work as a system for acquiring a second language. VanPatten et al. (2020) explain that “the basic claim of functional approaches is the centrality of meaning and function in influencing language structure and language acquisition” (p. 41). It is also important to note that

communication plays a significant role in this approach, as it is necessary for allowing ELLs to practice using the forms and functions of English while comparing it to their first language (i.e., L1). ELLs will naturally develop an interlanguage as they learn and distinguish the differences between grammatical principles in their L1 and L2. However, classroom instruction may inhibit this natural process through communication. Classroom communication amongst students is typically based on language and structure determined by the teacher with limited time for exploratory conversations. Under functional approach theories, ELLs must have time to converse and self-assess their effectiveness, but classrooms do not tend to lend themselves to these opportunities for discussion and conversation amongst peers without intervention from a teacher.

Usage-Based Approaches

Usage-based approaches to SLA focus on the idea that exposure to communicative use of their L2 and the use of cognitive mechanisms, not only employable in language learning, are necessary for acquiring language (VanPatten et al., 2020). In addition, usage-based approaches address explicit and implicit learning within the nature of their interface as being both essential in the process of language acquisition. This approach expresses the idea that it is necessary for both explicit and implicit learning experiences to occur to progress in acquiring a second language. Ellis (2005) discusses the concept a learners' system for language is developed over time from a combination of both explicit and implicit language learning. When implicit learning takes place initially, explicit learning can help to fill gaps in understanding how to effectively use that aspect of their L2. It is important to note that usage-based theories assert that implicit and explicit learning cannot achieve the same results in SLA exclusively. There must be a combination of both to ensure the development and growth of the learner in their L2. In the classroom, effective explicit language instruction is difficult

to achieve because of the need to be developmentally appropriate for the specific learner within their independent progress towards SLA (Ellis, 2005).

The Different Roles of the ESL and Content Teachers

In school settings that serve ELLs in the United States, there are typically both ESL teachers and content teachers. ESL teachers serve ELLs within an entire school building or multiple buildings and across several grade levels. The primary focus of the ESL teacher is to specifically aid SLA for learners from non-English backgrounds. Content teachers can teach a variety of subjects dependent on certification and experience. Within their classrooms, they may instruct students from many different backgrounds, including ELLs (McGriff & Protacio, 2015). Collaboration amongst both ESL and content teachers is essential in promoting successful SLA for ELLs. McGriff and Protacio (2015) explain the significance of a successful partnership between ESL and content teachers because it helps to ensure that content teachers have opportunities to learn how to best support ELLs in their classrooms, provide opportunities for guidance and learning from the ESL to the content teacher, and share the responsibilities that come with the task of implementing instruction that is geared towards meeting the needs of learners at different points in the process of SLA.

Needs of Content Teachers for Teaching ELLs

It is evident that many content teachers are not fully prepared to effectively teach ELLs for many reasons. Thus, it is important to explore what needs of these teachers can be met now that they have ELLs in their classrooms and may need support (Wang et al., 2008). It can be assumed that most teachers do try their best to accommodate ELLs despite having no formal training. However, it is important that mainstream teachers are careful while making efforts to

modify instruction for ESL students to be better included, so that they are not diminishing the level of learning compared to their English native-speaking peers. Literature suggests that in attempting to accommodate ELLs it has been found that oftentimes the content and instruction do not accurately depict content at the same level of rigor.

In the past, teacher preparation programs have not included ESL or SLA-specific courses as a graduation requirement (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). Aspiring teachers must add an endorsement or choose to take electives in these areas if they would like to receive instruction and experience related to teaching ELLs. It is much more common to have programs incorporate coursework related to different special needs populations aside from SLA. For this reason, many new teachers may not be ready to prepare for accommodations outlined in ILPs as they enter the classroom or teach ELLs for the first time.

Understanding that many new teachers will enter classrooms with little knowledge or understanding of how to meet the needs of ELLs proves that schools with ESL programs must have structures in place to ensure there is a plan to provide support (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). Some needs that schools should consider addressing with teachers new to teaching ELLs include ensuring that there is adequate time given to allow ESL and mainstream teachers to collaborate, developing and enforcing accountability measures, providing opportunities for teachers to improve their awareness of different cultural backgrounds, and providing adequate and consistent professional development opportunities for teachers to learn about SLA and effective ESL teaching strategies that can be used in the classroom (de Jong et al., 2018; Harvey & Teemant, 2012). By building in time for collaboration amongst ESL specialists and content teachers, schools can structure the other needs into the meetings.

Collaboration Amongst ESL and Content Teachers

One monumental issue that leads to many others is that there is no clear or universally appropriate way to structure the roles of the ESL and content teacher. However, there are considerations that can be considered while developing the best structure for a particular schedule and population of ELLs. McGriff and Protacio (2015) found in their research on the roles of ESL teachers in middle school settings that content teachers were more likely to follow the ESL teacher's lead when that teacher was perceived to be in a leadership role. This means that when the ESL teacher focused on creating curriculum resources and instructing content teachers on best practices, the content teachers were more likely to engage in the SLA initiatives being promoted (McGriff & Protacio, 2015). The ability of an ESL teacher to take on a leadership role is dependent on the school setting and the amount of time allotted to them for leadership and collaborative activities. In most cases, the ESL teacher is required to teach classes and maintain a certain number of daily minutes of service with specified students.

In addition, another study by Slater and Mahon (2010) found collaboration between ESL and content teachers as being essential in closing potential gaps in understanding when teaching in content classrooms. Not only must collaboration occur, but it must be skillful and intentional in outlining the upcoming tasks and associated language learning needed to be successful. In these preplanning collaboration meetings, teachers should focus on designing and employing appropriate accommodations and/or modifications outlined by each student's ILP that can help aid instruction throughout a unit. This would allow the content expert and the ESL expert to use their combined knowledge in developing an effective plan for content classroom instruction.

Still, conflict exists because of the lack of guidance and understanding surrounding how professional relationships between ESL and mainstream teachers should function. In a 2008 study, Arkoudis found that:

ESL teachers have felt uneasy about working with mainstream teachers as the professional relationship is fraught with misunderstandings and misconceptions, where the subject specialist has the power to accept or reject suggestions, and where ESL teachers feel increasingly frustrated in their work. (p. 428)

Misunderstandings and misconceptions in these relationships often go on due to the continued lack of planning time allowed for teachers to discuss plans and how to meet the needs of their current students. While collaboration is essential, there also needs to be consistent and repeated guidance or support offered to both ESL and mainstream teachers to set a foundation for the relationship and provide insight into how they can effectively work together (Arkoudis, 2008).

ELL Education Experience in the United States

SLA programs vary throughout the United States. Student experiences in acquiring English may look and sound different depending on the region or even the state that which they receive their education. This is because there is no federal standard for the instruction of ELLs and therefore states are allowed to develop their own guidelines based on their beliefs and attitudes towards SLA. However, federal requirements were developed after the culmination of the case *Lau v. Nichols* that took place in 1974. As a result of the case, schools must provide supplemental English instruction to support SLA. While this does leave states to create and establish a plan for effective English acquisition, there is reassurance that ELLs are receiving support no matter where they attend school in the United States.

Teacher Attitudes Towards ESL Students

The attitudes of teachers toward ESL students who have them as part of their classroom community play a critical role in determining if ELLs will feel welcomed in the new environment (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). Feeling welcome in a new environment helps

newcomer ELLs adjust more quickly and motivates them to become a part of the community which includes learning a new language. Whether teachers have a positive attitude toward teaching ELLs is significantly affected by their background and history with cultural diversity in their education programs, personal experiences, relationships with ESL students, and demographics (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014; Youngs & Youngs Jr., 2001). This correlation supports the necessity for teacher preparation programs to require future teachers to participate in courses that specifically discuss the experiences and needs of ELLs in different classroom environments and that promote or help them explore some aspect of cultural diversity and expand their understanding and acceptance of cultural differences. This is important because there are many teachers in the United States with limited backgrounds in cultural diversity, so there must be an initiative in place to educate them.

In 2018, Harrison and Lakin conducted a study to determine if mainstream teachers' implicit beliefs about ELLs tended to be more negative or positive. They found that inservice teachers' implicit beliefs tended to be slightly negative despite their explicit thoughts showing a positive view of ELLs (Harrison & Lakin, 2018). Current content teachers have been adjusting to the consistent growth of the ELL population. Even though they may have positive thoughts about welcoming them in class, they are still having to adapt and learn how to meet the needs of learners with vastly different English proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds than they are used to in the past.

Building Connections to Increase Motivation

Earlier, the concepts of input and explicit learning were discussed as being necessary for SLA to occur. Despite exposure to the second language, English, being present, there are other factors that must be taken into consideration when analyzing the success of ELLs in the United

States education system (López, 2010). Connection, identity, and motivation are significant factors to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of schools in promoting the SLA of ELLs. This is a central topic in the debate on the comparison of the effectiveness between Structured English Immersion (SEI) and bilingual instruction. Observations of both models for SLA instruction show that SEI fails to promote achievement amongst students from non-English backgrounds because it lacks the integration of student identity and first language structures. When students develop a sense of belonging to their school, they are more likely to be motivated to learn. A sense of belonging can be encouraged more so with bilingual approaches to instruction that incorporate opportunities for ELLs to connect to their native language and culture to make connections and build an understanding of their new language and environment.

Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) has become a focus for many schools in recent years. The emphasis on these types of activities can specifically be beneficial to ELLs who have come from vastly different backgrounds. Jagers and colleagues (2018) explain that

SEL refers to a process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions; set and achieve positive goals; feel and show empathy for others; establish and maintain positive relationships; and make responsible decisions. (p. 1)

As more school districts begin to implement SEL programs in schools based on positive results, researchers have begun to investigate if these activities have a positive impact on ELLs and their transition into a new environment.

Some ELLs enter schools in the United States with different ideas of socially acceptable interactions and behaviors in conjunction with little to no knowledge of the English language.

SEL activities lend themselves to an open discussion amongst all students about appropriate social behaviors and how to associate different emotions with social cues. It is important the teachers do recognize the potentially significant differences in cultural differences related to SEL as a burden and instead take the opportunity to learn and understand why a student might be behaving a certain way and find ways to incorporate the perspective into activities (Cho et al., 2019). For example, school environments may have many differences that include both physical and social aspects. Teaching and reviewing norms can be beneficial to students new to the country and may also provide opportunities for discussion about differences in school environment norms around the world.

Academic Vocabulary for ELLs

In middle school content classrooms, academic vocabulary plays a significant role in instruction. Wang et al. (2008) explained that

ESL programs have historically played the role of meeting students' needs for social interpersonal English. They have been criticized, however, for failing to develop ESL learners' academic English and for isolating them from regular school curricula and native English-speaking students.

Mainstream-content classes, on the other hand, may offer opportunities that ESL programs lack. The question remains as to if by mere physical presence in the mainstream, ESL learners can reap the advantages that such settings potentially provide. (p. 69)

This supports the importance of implementing meaningful practices and strategies meant to help ELLs acquire new academic vocabulary. Instruction becomes more accelerated with limited time for intervention and an increased amount of content-specific vocabulary integration.

Additionally, one of the main components of SLA theory is that the input, or language, spoken and presented to ELLs must be thoughtfully planned out in instructional settings to help give them opportunities to learn a new language that they would not necessarily learn in a typical social setting for the age group (Ellis, 2005; VanPatten et al., 2020; White, 2003).

Social and academic language vary in that academic language will tend to include more complex sentence structures and content-specific vocabulary (Bunch, 2010). Teachers must remember that despite an ELL seeming to understand how to use English socially, they may need more support when learning the new academic language (DeLuca, 2010). In addition, there must be awareness of how diverse ELLs will be regarding their prior experience learning and speaking English in their home country. This will have an impact on determining strategies that will be effective in helping them learn new academic vocabulary. For example, Nisbet and Tindall (2015) explain that overall language proficiency can vary based on how developed an ELL's native language (i.e., L1) is, and it is important to remember that ELLs are attempting to learn new content with much more complex language systems contributing to their overall understanding than their monolingual peers.

Implications of Standardized Testing

The growing emphasis on standardized testing has led to an increase in the development and acquisition of curriculum programs that are created to specifically improve test performance (Colombo & Fontaine, 2009). Standardized tests across all subjects and content areas typically consist of a majority of multiple-choice and multiple-select type tasks, so it is understood that new curriculum materials are geared toward teaching students how to answer those types of questions. Additionally, ELLs are typically subjected to more standardized assessments than their peers because of state requirements of ESL programs. This transition has been detrimental

to how often students can participate in activities in the classroom that promote language-rich discussion with both peers and teachers, which is especially harmful to ELLs who rely on meaningful interactions, or input, to develop their ability to use English in both academic and social settings (Colombo & Fontaine, 2009).

Standardized testing has led to a decrease in the time spent in a classroom for students to respond thoughtfully to open-ended and discussion questions (Jorgenson, 2012). Instead, students have become reliant on multiple-choice style questioning because of the format used when developing standardized and common assessments. This leads to a reduction of time dedicated to allowing students to brainstorm and discuss responses that use the rich academic vocabulary needed to understand topics. Students, especially ELLs, must be given opportunities to practice using new academic vocabulary in discussion and open-ended formatted activities to be able to communicate those words in the future and different settings (Colombo & Fontaine, 2009).

Academic Vocabulary Acquisition Strategies

Teaching new vocabulary to ELLs must be preplanned and intentional. There is typically a specified amount of time that a teacher gets each day to share a lesson with students. Therefore, it would be ideal for teachers to prepare and teach academic vocabulary, including both core academic words and content-specific words, to help ensure that ELLs are prepared to participate in instruction successfully and without frustration (Nisbet & Tindall, 2015). Teachers have the opportunity to use their special interest in a specific content area to share the interesting academic vocabulary that is needed to understand the information to the extent that they can also become excited about the material (Bunch, 2010).

One method for providing effective academic vocabulary instruction is through direct and

explicit instruction of the words before reading or beginning a unit of study. This process should include several activities to help students become more familiar with words outside of their text (Sibold, 2011). Some activities teachers can incorporate include having students repeat words, share translations, look for roots and affixes, use graphic organizers, and use realia. By pre-teaching key vocabulary words explicitly and through different methods, ELLs will be able to more fluently read and comprehend grade-level texts.

Throughout the unit of study, there are strategies that teachers can use while interacting with grade-level texts and other resources to help ELLs with academic vocabulary (Sibold, 2011). It is important that teachers highlight and discuss keywords throughout their discussion of unit materials, so ELLs can connect back to the explicit activities that they participated in before beginning the unit. Teachers can use organizers and think aloud to help students track the words that show up most often and are essential for developing a deep understanding of the content. There are many different vocabulary-specific organizers available to teachers for use in the classroom to help aid students in keeping track of new words and providing a place for recording their thoughts, connections, and associations.

Effective ESL Teaching Strategies and Resources

As mentioned previously, many teachers do not learn ESL teaching strategies in teacher preparation programs unless they are specifically enrolled in a program that is focused on ESL instruction in the form of an endorsement that can be added to an already existing teaching certification (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). This means that many teachers enter the classroom unprepared to provide effective SLA instruction to ELLs within their content classrooms. As a result, professional development must be available to teachers to ensure that they are given the opportunity to improve their understanding of SLA and what strategies they can integrate into

their lesson plans to help the ELLs that will be part of their classroom communities.

It is important to mention that many ESL instructional strategies are often included as accommodations on student ILPs (TN Department of Education, 2018). Content teachers must be aware and informed of what requirements are necessary to comply with each student's plan. Professional development opportunities that teach ESL instructional strategies and how to effectively incorporate them into lessons will help prepare content teachers and ensure that the needs of ELLs are met.

Technology Integration

Technology tools have improved and become more prevalent in recent years as essential for helping ensure that content is accessible to all ELLs. With the transition to virtual learning experience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, both teachers and students have been forced to adapt and learn new programs for classroom instruction. This has been beneficial in giving teachers opportunities to experience how useful many of these tools can be when used as aids for the instruction of ELLs. According to Irby et al. (2018), the use of technology tools helps to incorporate many aids for instruction accessibility with ease and have shown to improve understanding of content amongst ELLs in content classrooms.

One beneficial technology tool that can be used often in classrooms to help ELLs gain an understanding of new content is through the use of translation tools (Irby et al., 2018). Translation is often necessary for newcomers and when introducing new topics. Teachers should be knowledgeable of these tools as they are necessary to help clarify misunderstandings and provide ELLs with opportunities to discuss key points from texts (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). For example, if a class of mixed ELLs and native English speakers are reading a novel together, the ELLs who are fluent in their L1, but still struggling with grade-level academic language, can still

have access to the concept with the help of translation. Translation tools have vastly improved and expanded in recent years to include live presentation subtitles, PDF translations, and video subtitles that can be translated into many different languages. In addition, the tools have improved to provide much more accurate translation than they have previously. With more schools providing students with their own devices, this allows students the opportunities to learn how to use the tools independently and as needed. This gives the students a greater sense of independence in their classes, which is especially important for motivation as students continue to progress to middle and high school levels.

Another tool that is now integrated into many learning platforms and websites is a read-aloud of the text (Irby et al., 2018). Many websites provide the option for students to listen to the text read aloud to them through embedded audio clips. There is also a Google Chrome extension called Snap&Read that gives students the ability to highlight and listen to the text of their choice (Don Johnston Incorporated, 2016). There are several other accessibility features integrated into the extension to provide support with translation, chunking text, and simplifying vocabulary.

Cooperative Learning and Discussion

Another essential strategy that must be implemented in content classrooms is cooperative learning. Allowing students to engage in conversations about academic content is essential for SLA growth. As mentioned before, all SLA theories assert that communication is an integral aspect of acquiring a language that is needed for the EL to be able to engage in the cognitive processes necessary for adapting linguistically. By definition, “cooperative learning and grouping strategies involve putting students into pairs or small groups based on student needs, lesson objectives, or other factors” (Irby et al., 2018, p. 12). Within a content setting, this will need preplanning to ensure that students are positioned strategically.

As previously discussed, the push for standardized testing has also had a negative impact on how often students are able to communicate and utilize class time for discussion amongst their peers in less structured activities (Jorgenson, 2012). This is not only detrimental to the mental well-being and academic success of ELLs but also to their peers. Developmentally appropriate conversations help students share ideas and grow from one another. For ELLs, these conversations provide opportunities for them to listen to their peers use both social and academic language related to the content area they are studying. It also helps ELLs to feel more connected to the classroom community and with technology tools being more accessible, there are not as many barriers to overcome for them to become part of the conversation.

There should be planning involved to prepare for cooperative learning. Strategic grouping is necessary to help ensure that ELLs will be partnered or grouped with peers that will work to engage and communicate with each other (Irby et al., 2018). Depending on the make-up of the student population, the content teacher should consider the best groupings for encouraging active discussion.

Curriculum Resources

In addition to strategies, there must be attention focused on the availability of resources and materials available to ELLs. Many experts in classroom SLA have found that resources available for ELLs are often oversimplified and irrelevant to the content being presented to them in their grade-level or content area classrooms (Loewus, 2021). Curriculum programs are often purchased not for their inclusion of ESL resources, but for their alignment to state standards. Oftentimes, teachers are tasked with trying to fill the gaps left by the district-purchased curriculum materials. With content teachers already lacking knowledge of ESL instructional strategies, it is easy to assume that it would be difficult for them to find the time and resources to

develop high-quality and appropriate materials to aid the instruction of their ELLs. However, in recent years, many websites and blogs have emerged to help teachers connect and share resources that help fill instructional gaps.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding, or the process of providing maximum support through assistance and then gradually reducing the assistance as the student builds understanding, is a critical method to use when presenting new content to ELLs. It is important that ELLs have access to grade-level curriculum with the same opportunities for participation in rigorous activities as their peers (Von Esch & Kavanaugh, 2018). Therefore, when using scaffolding to introduce new content, teachers must be mindful to maintain the process and provide ample opportunities for ELLs to acquire the language necessary for effectively participating in activities alongside their native English-speaking peers. This concept is supported by Krashen's (1989) input hypothesis which supports the assertion that comprehensible input is essential in promoting incidental SLA in a classroom environment. It is important to note according to IH, the input must be comprehensible in order to be effective. This supports the implementation of scaffolding strategies and awareness of ZPD when ensuring that ELLs are consistently interacting with comprehensible input that will aid their SLA process.

A common challenge for content teachers who teach ELLs is determining their ZPD and using that knowledge to appropriately accommodate yet maintain the rigor of grade-level content (Bartone, 2020). ZPD refers to the difference between what a learner is able to do independently and what they can do with the assistance of adults or more capable peers. It can be difficult to distinguish an ELL's ZPD because of the language barrier. For example, it will be necessary to determine an ELL's ZPD in their L1 to determine whether written translations will be an

effective tool or not. If the student is not able to read in their L1, they must rely on verbal communication and translation. Additionally, it is important to meet with parents to determine their schooling history. If an ELL is a refugee, their education may have been greatly impacted and that must be taken into consideration. Even if an ELL is not a refugee, the education system in their home country may differ greatly from the United States.

Once teachers have determined the ZPD of the ELL they are planning instruction for, they can curate activities that provide them with appropriate independent activities as well as activities that they can work on collaboratively or with adult assistance. Teachers should not rely on making all activities solely accessible independently. ELLs must be given opportunities to expand their ZPD through the use of scaffolding for more difficult tasks with assistance.

Hands-On, Authentic, and Visual Activities

With language being the main barrier between ELLs understanding grade-level content, aside from translation tools, teachers can accommodate and help their students grow by sharing content using more visual and procedural methods. Literature suggests that to overcome language barriers, content teachers can try using physical objects to imitate real-life experiences that allow ELLs to learn through experience (Irby et al., 2018). This includes a range of student-centered activities like experiments, field trips, school grounds exploration, and project-based learning.

One of the key benefits of integrating these activities in the classroom more often for ELLs is that they regularly encourage cooperative learning and discussion amongst peers. As mentioned previously, discussion opportunities are an important aspect of helping to promote SLA. These activities also provide ELLs with authentic experiences related to the content. This is important because ELLs may come from a variety and spectrum of different educational,

social, and cultural backgrounds. It is important as teachers to not assume that ELLs have the same background experiences and understandings as their native English-speaking peers that have grown up in the United States. Hands-on activities help to provide ELLs with the experiences and opportunities to learn and share their own experiences with peers. In addition, it helps ELLs learn new academic language authentically, which helps them be better able to use the language on their own (Irby et al., 2018).

Summary

This literature review has provided an in-depth look at the theories that have been developed to explain the process of SLA and how it can be transferred to the classroom in the form of effective instructional practices that help ELLs. In addition, it also provided a reflection on the experiences of ELLs in classrooms in the United States and how an environment can play a role in motivation. Another portion of the literature discussed perceptions of current teachers and administrators of ESL programs and their role in ensuring that ELL needs are met in the classroom is another important topic discussed in this literature review. Understanding current beliefs is essential in determining what the next steps should be in pursuit of establishing and designing a curriculum that helps ELLs feel welcomed in their new environments while also receiving research-based instructional activities meant to aid in their acquisition of English.

Lastly, this literature review took an in-depth look at a range of instructional practices and strategies that can be used in content classrooms to help overcome the language barrier presented to ELLs. Specifically, research points out that academic language needs to be a focus in middle school classrooms as ELLs, despite becoming more fluent in social communication, will continue to struggle with content-specific vocabulary if they do not receive additional support. Additionally, the literature discussed other strategies and resources that can be used by

content teachers including technology tools, hands-on activities, and collaborative learning.

Chapter III

Methodology

This chapter will provide an overview of the research design and methodology used to establish and conduct this study. In addition, the purpose and research questions are restated with elaboration on the setting and participants involved. Furthermore, this chapter will outline and discuss the procedure of the study including data collection and analysis methods as well as the role and positionality of the researcher. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the teaching strategies used by middle school content teachers to support English language learners. In addition, it sought to examine middle school content teachers' perceptions of their ability to effectively teach English language learners. The research questions used to guide the study were as follows:

RQ1: What teaching strategies are middle school content teachers using to support English language learners?

RQ2: How do middle school content teachers perceive their ability to effectively teach English language learners?

RQ3: What support do middle school content teachers receive from schools to support the instruction of English language learners?

Context of the Study

The research study was conducted by collecting data from middle school content teachers in Tennessee. The setting was chosen because of the diverse population of students who represent a variety of cultural backgrounds and first languages. This ensured that many teachers in the population would be eligible to participate based on the criteria that they must have

worked with ELLs in their content classroom within the past five academic years. Therefore, the rationale for selecting Tennessee-based middle schools was that the pool of prospective participants would likely have many years of experience working with ELLs of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in their classrooms, thus providing meaningful feedback on their perspectives and understandings of the research questions discussed in the study.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was not considered to be part of any administration or coaching team in the state of Tennessee and thus did not influence any of the teacher's ongoing observations or future employment. As a further measure, all study surveys were submitted anonymously with no personal information being collected digitally unless the participant chose to reveal themselves through written responses.

Research Design

To gain a better understanding of the perspectives of the teachers in the school building on the ESL program, a qualitative, case study approach was used in this study. Baxter and Jack (2008) explain that the case study approach to qualitative research can be specifically helpful in studies that are hoping to answer "how" and "why" questions and when the behavior of participants cannot be manipulated. This study asked participants to reflect on their experiences with teaching ELLs and discuss their perceived effectiveness of instructional strategies used to promote SLA in their classrooms. This case study was descriptive because provided insight into real-life issues pertaining to teacher preparedness for implementing specific instructional strategies and resources for ELLs and their perceptions of how well they are doing in meeting those needs (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The study also provided insight into what needs teachers of ELLs have in the building as far as future professional development and training. In addition,

Likert-type and multiple-select style questions were included to easily determine the perceptions of the majority of the participants. The components of the research were aligned to the aforementioned research questions. A condensed version of key study information can be found in the research matrix in Appendix A.

Participants

Participants in the study were 10 content area teachers from middle schools located in Tennessee. All of the participants had earned a bachelor's degree or higher and were certified teachers in the state of Tennessee. Two of the participants had taken three or more ESL-specific collegiate courses, while the other eight participants took two or fewer courses. Three of the participants had 10 or more years of overall teaching experience, while the other seven participants' teaching experience varied from one to nine years. The majority of participants had four or fewer years of experience teaching ELLs in their content area classrooms. See Table 3.1 for participants' demographic characteristics.

Table 3.1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Teaching Experience	Highest Degree Held	ESL Collegiate Coursework Experience	ESL Teaching Experience
1	10+ years	Education Specialist	3+ courses	1–4 years
2	10+ years	Masters	0 courses	1–4 years
3	1–4 years	Masters	1 course	1–4 years
4	5–9 years	Bachelors	1 course	5–9 years
5	1–4 years	Masters	1 course	1–4 years
6	10+ years	Masters	0 courses	10+ years
7	1–4 years	Bachelors	0 courses	1–4 years
8	1–4 years	Masters	2 courses	1–4 years
9	10+ years	Masters	3+ courses	10+ years
10	5–9 years	Bachelors	1 course	5–9 years

Note. None of the participants had earned an ESL teaching endorsement, thus ESL Teaching

Experiences reflects how many years they have taught content classes with ELLs included in

their population of students.

Participant Selection

Participants were recruited through a personal and professional network of teachers via email/social to ask teachers to participate. The population of approximately 50 prospective participants was contacted via school and personal email to determine their willingness and eligibility to participate in the study. Initially, prospective participants were asked a series of questions to determine if they would be included in the data analysis. The inclusion criteria for this study was that participants had to be certified teachers who were currently employed as middle school teachers in a Tennessee public school. Further inclusion criteria were that the teachers must have taught English language learners within the past five years. Exclusion criteria included those who were not teachers, teachers that taught elementary or high school level, and those who had previously earned a teaching license in ELL, ESL, or teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Additionally, teachers who taught in private schools or outside the state of Tennessee will also be excluded.

Instrumentation

The participants in this study had to meet the aforementioned criteria, therefore it was necessary to implement a qualification questionnaire as an instrument at the beginning of the survey to gather information from prospective participants and determine if their survey will be used for analysis. In total, the survey consisted of 25 open- and closed-response questions meant to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences as middle school content teachers working with ELLs integrated into their classrooms. The questions were developed and adapted according to Saldaña's (2021) manual for qualitative researchers, which includes in vivo and descriptive coding.

The survey was separated into five categories to gather background information on each participant and their feedback aligned to each research question. The categories included: eligibility questions, background information, support, effectiveness, and teaching strategies. The full survey can be found in Appendix B.

Procedure

After IRB approval was secured, my committee chair and I tested the survey to ensure that participant identity would remain anonymous and that the form was working as intended. See Appendix C to view the IRB approval letter. Once the survey was reviewed, I began reaching out to a network of current and former colleagues who were believed to be potential participants based on knowledge of their past and current teaching experience. I corresponded via email using an informational letter and invitation found in Appendix D.

Once potential participants received the recruitment letter via email, they had the option to proceed to the survey by clicking on the attached link. The link navigated them to the Google Form for the survey. They then proceeded to the Participant Informed Consent Form found in Appendix E, which they consented to before proceeding to the study survey. After agreeing to and completing the informed consent form, participants completed the survey portion of the study.

Data Collection

Before sending the survey to potential participants, the survey was sent to the committee chair of this study to provide expert feedback that would help ensure that questions were appropriate and well-developed with the study's research questions in alignment. The survey (Appendix B) was sent to potential participants. Once the survey received 10 participants who met all eligibility requirements, the data were loaded into a Google Sheet for analysis. The

survey was anonymous, so participants are identified by number in Table 3.1.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were collected and stored digitally using Google Forms and Google Sheets. Content analysis was used to analyze participant responses. The purpose of using content analysis was to examine the responses for gathering both explicit and implicit understandings (Stemler, 2000). A key component of formulating a response to the research questions was to interpret the feedback provided by participants to determine future recommendations and topics for future study. For example, the study helped determine what professional development opportunities would be most beneficial to middle school teachers preparing to teach ELLs in their content-based classrooms.

Descriptive statistics were used to determine trends with responses and determine correlation amongst responses in the data (Saldaña, 2021). The use of in vivo coding helped with this process in that it used the language of the participants in their responses to search for any consistencies or trends within the feedback amongst all participants. I began by organizing participant responses by question. After organizing, I read through the data to code words and phrases that were repeatedly mentioned by participants. I reviewed the data to code words and phrases per question and also throughout the survey in totality. Coding the data allowed me to determine the overarching themes discussed in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To ensure trustworthiness, all prospective and selected participants were provided with thorough descriptions of the purpose and potential benefits or insight that could result from the study (Guba, 1981). Throughout the data collection process, it was essential to keep participants informed and allow them many opportunities to ask questions about the study itself and the

process. At the start of the study process, the recruitment email provided contact information for the researcher and committee chair. Once participants navigated to the survey, they were brought to the Informed Consent Form (Appendix E), which again informed them of how to contact the researcher and added contact information for the IRB. Upon completion of the survey, participants were reminded to contact the researcher should they have any questions or wish to hear about the results of the study in the future.

Furthermore, it was essential that participant feedback was not taken out of context or manipulated to ensure that the rigor of transferability was maintained (Krefting, 1991). Throughout the data analysis process, direct quotations from participants' open-ended responses were analyzed and reviewed to ensure that nothing could be misconstrued in the study findings. All quotes from participants were included in their original form and mistakes were marked appropriately with "[sic]" to show that the words have not been modified from how they were originally submitted on the study survey. If an explanation or clarification was needed, I provided unbiased insight to help clarify what was meant by the participant.

Researcher Positionality

While I was the researcher of this study, I was also a teacher with experience instructing in all content areas and ESL pull-out and push-in settings. Pull-out ESL instruction is when students receive specific instruction outside of their other classes and push-in setting allow ESL teachers to provide support for ELLs within their other classroom settings. Before teaching in Tennessee, I taught in New Jersey and noticed significant differences in how the instruction of ELLs was approached in the two states. This is what initially sparked my interest in further investigating the perception of teachers in TN who currently teach ELLs or have taught them in the recent past. I hoped to gain a better understanding of what content teachers implement in

their classrooms to meet the needs of ELLs and their perceptions of their effectiveness. In addition, I hoped collect data that helps me develop a support plan for teachers struggling in this area.

Chapter Summary

The information presented in Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research design and methodological approach of the study. The research questions were restated, as well as, the process used to solicit participants and analyze data based on their survey submissions.

Chapter IV

Findings

This study utilized a qualitative, case study approach to provide insight into the problem of practice outlined in the first chapter. Qualitative data were retrieved through the use of a survey that was completed by 10 public middle school teachers who teach a content area and have experience teaching ELLs. This chapter discusses the data and commentary provided by participants on their survey submissions. The findings are organized by research question. Additionally, participants are identified by number as outlined in Table 3.1. The findings address the perceptions of the participants on their experiences with teaching ELLs in their content classrooms, the strategies they use to support ELLs, and what supports would be beneficial to their professional development of expertise in ESL instruction.

RQ1: What teaching strategies are middle school content teachers using to support English language learners?

RQ2: How do middle school content teachers perceive their ability to effectively teach English language learners?

RQ3: What support do middle school content teachers receive from schools to support the instruction of English language learners?

Table 4.1 shows themes that emerged from the data collected and analyzed with excerpts from participant submissions.

Table 4.1*Overarching Themes*

Categories	Themes	Sample Excerpts
Teaching Strategies	Focus on Vocabulary	“Vocabulary building is my favorite strategy because, ELLs get to learn and practice new complex words by reading, listening, and writing exercises”
	Building Relationships	“Building relationships with the students and letting them teach me, in addition to embracing their culture and language.”
	Translation Tools	“DocTranslator due to the ability to make everything accessible to all students no matter their language.”
Perceptions of Effectiveness	Lack of Consistency in Effectiveness	“If they know some English, my teaching is effective. If they do not speak any English, it is very difficult to teach effectively.”
	Varied Assessments of Effectiveness	“Depends upon the student but generally just through formal and informal assessments but also through relational conversation in class.”
Educational Supports	Lack of Collegiate or Formal Training	“I have not had much training, just the small amount I have been able to gather from the ELLevation website.”
	Collaborative Planning and Support from the ESL Teacher	“Collaborative planning with the ELL teacher in the building to share current classroom content and student struggles. Being able to have time to collaborate with the ELL teacher would benefit both the students and the core content teacher.”
	Focused Professional Development	<p>“A guide to what all of the ELL accommodations are and strategies to implement them.”</p> <p>“Learning all of the translation tools would help. Some kids know zero English.”</p>

Teaching Strategies (RQ1)

Research Question 1 sought to identify the teaching strategies currently being employed by middle school content teachers to support ELLs in their classrooms. After analyzing the survey responses, three dominant themes emerged relative to the strategies that the teachers focus on while working with ELLs: (a) focus on vocabulary, (b) building relationships, and (c) translation tools.

Focus on Vocabulary

Several participants indicated that they perceive vocabulary instruction as one of the most important teaching strategies they use to support ELLs in their middle school content classrooms. Participants noted that it was essential for them to pre-teach academic vocabulary words before beginning a unit of study to increase comprehension of key topics being presented. Participant 2 said, “I love having them in an additional class that allows me to spend more time on vocabulary, front load the lesson, and slow down instruction so that they participate in class with their peers.” It is also noted from this response that Participant 2 is able to provide necessary vocabulary instruction through the use of an additional class period and this may not be available to other teachers.

Similarly, Participant 7 mentioned that

vocabulary building is my favorite strategy because, ELLs get to learn and practice new complex words by reading, listening, and writing exercises. During instruction, I verbally use the word as a sentence so they can connect the other senses (excluding taste) to enhance their comprehension.

It is evident that understanding academic vocabulary specific to the areas of study is critical in ensuring that ELLs will be successful with the content being presented in their classrooms.

Building Relationships

Another theme that emerged when participants were discussing prompts related to teaching strategies was their use of relationship building to promote ELL success in their middle school content classrooms. In regard to the strategies that had positive impacts on ELLs in their classroom, Participant 2 explained,

Building relationships with the students and letting them teach me, in addition to embracing their culture and language. I use both their language and English to teach my content. Making sure to include the families in the process. Not embracing their culture and not teaching with their foundational language, becoming frustrated when they are communicating in their home language, and not involving their families in the learning process.

In addition to Participant 2's reflection on the impacts of relationship building amongst ELLs and content teachers, several other participants mentioned the strategy as being essential.

Participant 4 commented that in order for ELLs to have positive learning experiences, they must have "Understanding from the teachers and not being [*sic*] ignored." Participant 7 wrote that "Building a professional student/teacher relationship and checking on his progress in other content classes," is necessary to ensure ELL success. Lastly, Participant 8 explained, "I think positive relationship and taking the extra time to prepare content for the students who are ELLs." Although there is some variability in the participants' thoughts, it is evident that they all agree that ELLs and their families benefit from the development of strong, intentional relationships with their content teachers, as well as, recognition and inclusion of native language and culture in planning instruction.

Translation Tools

The third theme that emerged when participants were discussing prompts and responding to multiple-select items related to teaching strategies was their use of different translation tools to help ELLs be successful in their middle school content classrooms. Several participants noted translation tools as their favorite resources. Out of the 10 participants, eight of them indicated that they use Google Translate as a tool to help ELLs. When asked what their favorite resource was to use with ELLs, Participant 8 said, “Google Translate by far.” Participant 10 concurred with Participant 8 by stating, “Google Translate- while not perfect, it allows us to go back and forth efficiently.”

In addition to Google Translate, Participant 2 and Participant 3 noted that their favorite translation tool is PowerPoint. With this tool, teachers are able to display live, translated subtitles of what is being spoken in the classroom. Participant 2 explained that “It all was [*sic*] the students to follow what I am teaching and ask the questions they may have so that I can answer them in a way they can understand.” Participant 4 added that their favorite tool is “DocTranslator due to the ability to make everything accessible to all students no matter their language.” DocTranslator is an extension of Google Translate that allows users to upload documents and have them translated into different languages. It is evident that technology enhancements have created more access to varied translation tools in the classroom and are being perceived by teachers as necessary and essential learning tool when working with ELLs in their middle school content classrooms.

Thematic Summary: Research Question 1

The purpose of Research Question 1 was to better understand the teaching strategies currently being used by middle school content teachers to support and instruct ELLs in their

classrooms. Participants described that it was necessary to focus on vocabulary to ensure their instruction was effective. In addition, participants indicated relying on building relationships to support the ELLs in their classrooms. Also, participants indicated a reliance on different translation tools to support ELLs, especially those new to learning English.

Perceptions of Effectiveness (RQ2)

Research Question 2 sought to describe participant perceptions of their ability to effectively teach ELLs in their classrooms. After analyzing the survey responses, two dominant themes emerged relative to the perceptions of their effectiveness: (a) lack of consistency of effectiveness and (b) varied assessments of effectiveness.

Lack of Consistency of Perceived Effectiveness

Participants were asked in the survey to determine if they were effective in teaching ELLs in their middle school content classrooms and to explain their perceptions. The responses to this question varied greatly amongst all participants.

Out of the 10 participants, two of them succinctly stated that they were not effective in their instruction of ELLs. Participant 5 said, “I feel like it is not. I am a first-year teacher and still learning the content.” Similarly, Participant 10 explained, “No, I was new to the grade and the content and was learning the content as I was teaching it and therefore I could not create adequate assignments to support ELL [*sic*] learners.” These responses indicate that it was a struggle for these participants to meet the needs of ELLs because of the challenges they faced in new positions that required them to simultaneously gain a better understanding of the content themselves. In addition, the responses indicate that teachers may perceive their need to learn and master new content as a priority over becoming familiar with the needs and abilities of their ELLs.

Out of the 10 participants, four of them explained that whether they were effective in their teaching of ELLs or not depended on certain circumstances. For example, Participant 3 explained, “If they know some English, my teaching is effective. If they do not speak any English, it is very difficult to teach effectively.” In this statement, Participant 3 acknowledges that they struggle with teaching ELLs who are new to English. In contrast, Participant 4 explained, “Sometimes, I feel that I am only effective with kids on the lowest end or the highest end of the ELL spectrum but the middle range gets overlooked.” Participant 6 explained different circumstances related to effort by stating that their effectiveness, “Depends on the student and the modification. Sometimes the students don't want to learn and nothing I do will help them. Sometimes they are motivated and I can help them.” Finally, Participant 8 related to Participant 3 in the struggles of teaching ELLs new to English, but further explained by stating

I think my teaching is fairly effective. While it is hard to teach a 1st year student who is learning the language it is also where the student can achieve the greatest growth. It is difficult to manage students who are ELL with other IEP's and 504's if they are compiled into the same class.

Participant 8's commentary is an accurate reflection of the varied student populations that teachers must be prepared to teach in their content classrooms.

Lastly, out of the 10 participants, four participants affirmed that they perceived their instruction of ELLs as being effective. Participant 1 stated, “Yes, because I take the time to understand their needs.” Similarly, Participant 2 explained,

I believe that my teaching is effective because I have taken the extra steps to create a second class that allows me the ability to pre-teach, focus on vocabulary, and provide

homework support that the students often don't get at home because they have parents that speak a different language. So, they struggle with providing that support.

Both Participant 1 and Participant 2's responses show confidence in their abilities to effectively instruct ELLs. Participant 7 responded by stating, "Yes. Because, one student in particular has kept up with classwork, has not failed ELA throughout the school year and improved in classroom behavior." Participant 9 responded by stating, "Yes, but I'm stuck with their other classes providing little to no accommodations." While both Participant 7 and Participant 9 perceive their instruction of ELLs as being effective, their explanations are limited. Finally, when responding to the Likert-type questions, the majority of participants expressed that they felt proficient in their understanding of how to incorporate modifications and accommodations listed in their ELL students' learning and assessment plans. Additionally, the majority of participants reported being successful in incorporating modifications and accommodations listed in their ELL students' learning plans.

Varied Assessments of Effectiveness

Each participant was asked how they measure the effectiveness of their instruction of ELLs. Table 4.2 shows the varied responses from each participant. It is evident from the responses that the participants use their discretion dependent on resources available to them in their content area to assess the effectiveness of their instruction of ELLs. Aside from Participant 5 and Participant 6, all other participants indicated the use of both formal and informal assessments to determine the effectiveness of their instruction of ELLs regularly.

Thematic Summary: Research Question 2

The purpose of Research Question 2 was to describe participant perceptions of their ability to effectively teach ELLs in their classrooms. Participant responses showed a lack of

consistency in the perceived effectiveness of their instruction of ELLs. In addition, participant responses showed that they are using varied assessments to determine the effectiveness of ESL instruction.

Table 4.2

Assessments of Effective ESL Instruction

Participant	Response
1	FastBridge, classroom assessments, teacher observation
2	Their growth in their CUA, weekly quizzes, and daily CFU's [<i>sic</i>].
3	Formative assessments and CFUs
4	Ability to understand the content and ability to process the texts without translations.
5	Standardized testing
6	Assessments
7	Measurements used are assessments, written and [<i>sic</i>] verbal responses pertaining to assigned texts.
8	Depends upon the student but generally just through formal and informal assessments but also through relational conversation in class.
9	I look at their achievements and my observation.
10	Test data, bellringer days, level of independence

Educational Supports (RQ3)

Research Question 3 sought to determine what support participants receive from schools to aid the instruction of ELLs in their classrooms. After analyzing the survey responses, three dominant themes emerged relative to the support they previously received from their schools and what they believe would be helpful in the future: (a) lack of collegiate or formal training, (b) collaborative planning and support from the ESL teacher, and (c) focused professional development.

Lack of Collegiate or Formal Training

None of the participants in this study had earned an ELL teaching endorsement or certification at the time of taking the survey as it was an eligibility requirement. This study sought to determine if the participants received any collegiate or formal training without seeking endorsements or certification to teach any aspect of SLA.

As outlined in Table 3.1, Participant 1 and Participant 9 participated in three or more collegiate courses focused on teaching ELLs. Participant 8 participated in two collegiate courses focused on teaching ELLs. Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 10 participated in one course focused on teaching ELLs. Lastly, Participant 2, Participant 6, and Participant 7 did not participate in any collegiate courses focused on teaching ELLs despite having earned degrees and certifications in the field of education.

Participants were asked to describe what training or coursework has been most beneficial to them in preparing to instruct ELLs. Several responses reflected a lack of opportunities to participate in training. Participant 1 simply stated, “Not Applicable.”

Participant 5 explained

I have not had much training, just the small amount I have been able to gather from

the ELLevation website [ELLevation is software that schools use to track the progress of ELLs and it also provides resources to support their learning].

Participant 6 stated, “I did not have any formal training.” Participant 8’s response indicated a reliance on translation tools to aid instruction by stating, “Embedded Translation Tools.”

Only Participant 2 and Participant 4 indicated having previous opportunities to participate in training or professional development focused on the instruction of ELLs.

Collaborative Planning and Support from the ESL Teacher

Participants were asked to discuss the support they receive and what they perceive to be the most beneficial to ELLs. Many of the responses included references to opportunities for collaboration amongst content teachers and the building ESL teacher. Participant 2 explained that content teachers would benefit from “Collaborative planning with the ELL teacher in the building to share current classroom content and student struggles. Being able to have time to collaborate with the ELL teacher would benefit both the students and the core content teacher.” Similarly, Participant 5 reflected by stating “I feel I would benefit from collaborative planning to help build a stronger lesson for these students.”

Based on their experience Participant 8 explained that “The ELL teachers in my school have been very helpful as well as having highly competent classroom aides who are familiar with ELL strategies and are dedicated to the success of the students.” In addition, Participant 10 stated, “My ELL teacher was extremely supportive.” Based on these responses, it is evident that the participants perceive collaboration as being significantly important to the effective instruction of ELLs.

Focused Professional Development

The third theme that emerged related to the support needed to promote effective

instruction of ELLs in middle school content classrooms was the need for focused professional development and training. This theme is related to the previous two themes discussed in this section because it is based on the indication of participants that many of them lack training and believe they would benefit from being given time to collaborate with the ESL teacher. When responding to Likert-type questions, participants revealed that the majority of them have been offered opportunities for professional development meant specifically to increase my understanding of best supporting instruction for ELLs. However, their open-ended responses indicated the need for more needs-based and ongoing professional development opportunities.

For example, Participant 3 explained that they would benefit from “Learning all of the translation tools.” In addition, Participant 4 stated that they would benefit from “A guide to what all of the ELL accommodations are and strategies to implement them.” To add, Participant 8 stated the need for “clarity of expectations such as grading strategies and tracking growth.” Participant 9 explained that they would benefit from “explicit examples to use in lessons. I suggest providing them in the district hub for the first few lessons in each unit/quarter.” Finally, Participant 10 expressed a need for “Time or help modifying assignments.” Participants revealed that they have many different needs in relation to support for instructing ELLs.

Thematic Summary: Research Question 3

The purpose of Research Question 3 was to determine what support participants receive from schools to aid the instruction of ELLs in their classrooms. Participant responses showed a lack of formal training for most participants. Participants expressed the need for collaborative planning with an ESL teacher and focused professional development opportunities to improve the effectiveness of their instruction of ELLs.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided an overview of data and commentary collected from in-depth surveys completed by public middle school teachers with experience teaching ELLs in their content classrooms. The key findings of this study showed that teachers are aware of and attempting to implement effective teaching strategies. In addition, participant responses indicated a lack of consistency in their perceptions of effectiveness with different students and how to assess their growth. Furthermore, participants expressed a need for time to collaborate with the building ESL teacher and participate in ESL-specific professional development sessions.

Chapter V

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore (1) the teaching strategies being used by middle school content teachers to support ELLs, (2) how middle school content teachers perceive their ability to effectively teach ELLs, and (3) the support that middle school content teachers currently and wish to receive to improve the effectiveness of their instruction of ELLs. The following section presents a summary of the overarching themes that are presented from the analysis of survey responses submitted by participants in this case study as they relate to the literature discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, this chapter will conclude with an explanation of the limitations, delimitations, and implications of the study for future research.

Discussion

Analysis of the survey responses submitted for this research revealed three evident conclusions related to the experiences of middle school content teachers supporting the SLA of ELLs. First, it is evident that many teachers are tasked with the responsibility to instruct ELLs in their classroom without having received much if any, related formal training. Second, participants expressed the need for additional and ongoing access to support, training, and resources. Finally, participants indicated that ELLs would benefit from increased opportunities for collaboration amongst content and ESL teachers.

Preparing Teachers to Use Effective ESL Teaching Strategies (RQ1)

In the United States, the fight for equitable educational opportunities for all has been litigated since the 1960s. The landmark case of *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974 established precedence that public schools in the United States must provide equitable learning

experiences to all students, which meant that all learning opportunities would not be identical as learners have different needs, specifically based on their background knowledge of English in regard to this case. However, the U.S. Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights (2020b) still only holds schools to the requirements of implementing an ESL program based on educational theory, which is adequately supported to ensure a chance of success and allow for opportunities to evaluate and revise the program as needed. This lack of specificity has left decision-making largely up to states and school districts and thus a lack of awareness of how imperative it is that teachers receive training to prepare for providing effective instruction to ELLs by using research-based strategies.

Developing an understanding of the theories surrounding the process of SLA, are both varied and complex. The findings of the present study indicate that preservice education was inadequate among participants surveyed in providing opportunities to participate in courses that would provide them with a framework for understanding the major theories related to SLA. Previously, Rubinstein-Avila and Lee (2014) also concluded that it was common that teacher preparation courses did not require ESL or SLA-specific courses to graduate.

Additionally, middle school content teachers reiterated the importance of vocabulary instruction for ELLs in this study. Their sentiments are widely supported by an abundance of research aimed at proving how to effectively aid the SLA of ELLs. The findings in this study and former research assert the need for teachers to intentionally plan for direct instruction of academic vocabulary to ensure that ELLs are prepared to successfully participate in whole-group and small-group instruction with peers (Nisbet & Tindall, 2015). Teachers must have access to training and resources that will allow them to implement a variety of activities that promote vocabulary acquisition.

It is evident that middle school content teachers are tasked with providing effective instruction to ELLs despite not having formal training or foundational knowledge of SLA. The findings in this study further support the importance of teacher-preparation programs including requirements that teacher candidates participate in coursework designed to give them a foundational understanding of theory related to SLA and an overview of current research related to providing effective instruction to ELLs through the use of research-based teaching strategies. By ensuring that teachers are adequately trained, the U.S. Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights can be better assured that schools are being held accountable in their implementation of appropriate and equitable ESL programs with fidelity.

Improving Perceptions of Effectiveness (RQ2)

Having access to support, training, and resources is essential to all teachers. As evidenced in this study, it is especially critical for content teachers with limited training or experience with teaching ELLs to have a multitude of opportunities for professional growth. All of the participants in this study voiced the desire to receive different types of support and training in order to improve their effectiveness when it comes to supporting ELLs in their content classrooms. Past research further supports the need for access to support in training as it is not only proven to improve ELL academic outcomes but also improve implicit beliefs and attitudes of teachers related to teaching ELLs in content classrooms (Harrison & Lakin, 2018; Rubenstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). It is evident from this current study and prior research that when teachers are better prepared and supported, they are implicitly more positive towards supporting ELLs and explicitly more confident in their positive perception of effectiveness. Once foundational knowledge and experience improves, teachers' perceived effectiveness will become more positive because of their progress.

Additionally, middle school content teachers noted using a variety of resources that involved the use of technology. With students being more likely to have one-to-one access to individual laptops or tablets, teachers are able to utilize a wider range of technological tools. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to remote learning prompted many companies to develop and improve programs and websites for educational use by students. Based on participant responses and coinciding research, it is apparent that the growth of technology tools has shown to have a positive impact on instruction accessibility for ELLs with different needs in SLA (Irby et al., 2018). Specifically, participants discussed the necessity of translation tools in helping them communicate and effectively instruct ELLs in their classrooms. However, it is important that teachers are trained on how to appropriately implement the use of new and developing translation tools and programs.

Access to Educational Supports (RQ3)

ESL teachers can assume many different roles and responsibilities depending on their school. Within those roles and responsibilities, it is evident that ESL teachers must be given time to collaborate with content teachers who serve ELLs. Participants in this study mentioned several times the positive outcomes that resulted from collaboration and the desire for increased opportunities to work directly with the building ESL teacher.

Research reiterates the positive growth of ELLs that results from intentional time planned for collaboration amongst ESL and content teachers (Slater & Mahon, 2010). Collaboration promotes the building of relationships as content teachers develop a better understanding of the individual needs of ELLs and how to best help them with guidance from the ESL teacher. Despite challenges with time, schools should aim to provide this time to

teachers as it is proven to build confidence amongst content teachers in their ability to effectively instruct and meet the needs of ELLs in their classrooms.

Limitations

There were specific limitations present in relation to this study. For instance, the study was conducted at the end of the academic school year, which may have resulted in a decreased response rate. Another limitation is that the pool of participants only represents the state of Tennessee. While the participants have varied backgrounds and experiences, they may be similarly influenced by statewide-specific norms or training.

Delimitations

Certain delimitations were imposed to ensure that the survey responses provided feedback from participants with sufficient background experience. Participants must have been (a) a teacher in Tennessee, (b) have taught active ELLs in their content classrooms in the past five years, and (c) have not earned an ELL teaching endorsement or certification in the past.

Implications for Practice, Research, and Policy

This study contributes to a body of research related to the experiences of teachers in preparing to effectively teach and support language acquisition by ELLs in their content classrooms. The results of the study yield implications for practice, research, and policy. Based on the findings of the study, implications for practice include ensuring that middle school content teachers receive the support necessary to ensure the academic success of all ELLs by (a) providing ongoing opportunities for professional development and (b) providing opportunities for content teachers to collaborate with the building ESL teacher and other professionals with expertise in the ESL program and SLA. Implications for future research include (a) conducting an evaluation of required coursework in teacher-preparation programs

to determine if SLA and ESL continue to be neglected as graduation requirements, (b) replicating the study with a larger sample group or in a different state to determine if similar results are produced, and (c) conducting a study to explore the perceptions of ELL students on teacher effectiveness. Finally, implications for policy include (a) requiring teacher-preparation programs include coursework as a graduation requirement that would provide prospective teachers with a foundational understanding of SLA and effective instruction of ELLs, (b) requiring teachers to earn an ESL teaching endorsement or certification prior to teaching ELLs, and (c) urging the U.S. Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights (2020b) to develop more specific guidelines for schools to follow in regard to implementation of effective ESL programs.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study indicated that teachers received minimal opportunities to participate in collegiate coursework or formal training related to understanding SLA or how to effectively teach ELLs. This finding presents a significant implication for practice. This implication suggests that school districts and state-wide education initiatives should develop a plan for providing teachers with the necessary knowledge needed to provide effective instruction to ELLs. It is evident based on the findings that teachers are inadequately trained to meet the needs of this population of students and thus it is the responsibility of the schools to close this gap.

It is imperative that schools implement a plan for ongoing and accessible professional development opportunities focused on preparing and supporting teachers throughout the school year to ensure the success of ELLs in middle school content classrooms. In addition, schools should plan accordingly to allow for content teachers to have an appropriate amount

of time to regularly meet with their building ESL teacher. Providing a multitude of opportunities for learning and collaboration will not only prepare but also persist in providing guidance and feedback to content teachers who are servicing ELLs in their classrooms.

Implications for Research

While conducting this research, implications for future research were realized. One implication for future research would include conducting an evaluation of required coursework in teacher-preparation programs to determine if SLA and ESL continue to be overlooked as necessary graduation requirements. The significance of conducting an evaluation of teacher preparation programs is that it could help determine if coursework related to SLA and ESL continues to only be required in programs specifically related to those concentrations of study. As the population of ELLs in the United States continues to grow, it becomes imperative that prospective teachers participate in coursework related to developing an understanding of SLA and the educational experiences and needs of ELLs.

Another implication for future research would be to replicate the study with a larger sample group or in a different state to determine if similar results are produced. This study was limited to a small group of teachers with experience teaching ELLs in Tennessee. It would be enlightening to explore and analyze commentary from content teachers who represent a variety of demographics to determine if experiences with teaching ELLs in content classrooms vary depending on different circumstances.

Finally, conducting a study that is meant to explore and examine the perceptions of ELL students on their teachers' effectiveness would be beneficial to the present and future studies. Comparing the responses from both teachers and students would provide a full

understanding of their perceptions and provide insight into protentional misconceptions held by teachers.

Implications for Policy

The findings in this study provide an understanding of the needs of middle school content teachers who teach ELLs. One implication for policy would be to require that teacher-preparation programs include coursework as a graduation requirement that would provide prospective teachers with a foundational understanding of SLA and effective instruction of ELLs. Requiring coursework would ensure that teachers who have completed teacher-preparation programs have been informed of the foundations of SLA and have some understanding of the needs of ELLs that they are likely to serve in their classrooms. The study revealed that many teachers do not receive formal training related to teaching ELLs. Thus, it is necessary to systemically create more opportunities for formal training in order to meet the needs of this growing population of students.

Another implication for policy includes implementing a requirement that teachers earn an ESL teaching endorsement or certification prior to teaching ELLs. It is prudent that schools place ELLs in classrooms with teachers who have received training on how to effectively meet their needs. By requiring appropriate certification, schools can ensure that ELLs are being provided with equitable opportunities for success in the classroom compared to their peers.

Furthermore, another implication of policy related to the findings in this study suggests the need for the U.S. Department of Education and Office for Civil Rights (2020b) to develop more specific guidelines for schools to follow regarding the implementation of effective ESL programs. As of now, the guidelines are vague, which leaves them open to interpretation by

individual school officials. As evidenced in the study, this leads to inconsistency in the methods and programs, or lack thereof, used by teachers to instruct and assess ELLs.

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Appendix A

Research Matrix

Research Questions	Constructs	Measures and Instruments	Data Collection	Data Analysis
RQ1: What teaching strategies are middle school content teachers using to support English language learners?	Effective teaching strategies for ELs	Survey -Closed Items -Open Items -Multiple-Select	Once Post-survey analysis	Descriptive statistics, in vivo and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021) In vivo and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021)
RQ2: How do middle school content teachers perceive their ability to effectively teach English language learners?	Preparedness of content Teachers to instruct ELs during sheltered instruction; Perceptions of content teachers on their role in instructing ELs during sheltered instruction	Survey -Closed Items -Open Items -Likert Scale	Once Post-survey analysis	Descriptive statistics, in vivo and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021) In vivo and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021)
RQ3: What support do middle school content teachers receive from schools to support the instruction of English language learners?	Support at the collegiate level; Support from school districts	Survey -Closed Items -Open Items -Likert Scale	Once Post-survey analysis	Descriptive statistics, in vivo and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021) In vivo and descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021)

Appendix B

Survey

Eligibility Questions

1. Are you a current or former middle school (grades 5-8) public-school teacher in Tennessee?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
2. Have you taught active English Language Learners (ELLs) in your classroom in the past 5 years?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
3. Have you ever earned an endorsement or been certified to teach ESL, ELL, ESOL, or TESOL?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

Background Information

4. How many years have you been teaching in any role as a certified educator?
 - ☐ 1-4
 - ☐ 5-9
 - ☐ 10 or more
5. What is your highest degree held?
 - ☐ Not Applicable
 - ☐ Associates (AA, AS)
 - ☐ Bachelors (BA, BS)
 - ☐ Masters (MA, MS)
 - ☐ Education Specialist (Ed.S)
 - ☐ Doctorate (Ed.D)
6. How many credit hours of coursework was **required** of you as an **undergraduate student in Bachelors Program** that specifically addressed teaching English Language Learners (ELLs)? *Please remember one college course is typically 3 credit hours.
 - ☐ 0 hours/No courses
 - ☐ 3 hours/1 course
 - ☐ 6 hours/2 courses
 - ☐ 9 hours or more/3 courses or more
7. How many credit hours of coursework was **required** of you as a **graduate student in a Master's Program** that specifically addressed teaching English Language Learners (ELLs)? *Please remember one college course is typically 3 credit hours.
 - ☐ 0 hours/No courses

- 3 hours/1 course
 - 6 hours/2 courses
 - 9 hours or more/3 courses or more
 - Not Applicable
8. How many credit hours of coursework was **required** of you as a **post-graduate/Ed.S. or Ed.D. Programs** that specifically addressed teaching English Language Learners (ELLs)?
*Please remember one college course is typically 3 credit hours.
- 0 hours/No courses
 - 3 hours/1 course
 - 6 hours/2 courses
 - 9 hours or more/3 courses or more
 - Not Applicable
9. How many years of experience do you have instructing ELLs in your content classroom (ELA/Social Studies/Science/Math)?
- 1-4
 - 5-9
 - 10 or more
10. What teacher preparation training or coursework has been the most beneficial in preparing you to teach ELLs?

Support

11. I have been offered opportunities for professional development meant specifically to increase my understanding of best supporting instruction for ELLs.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
12. Individualized Learning Plans are held in the same regard as other student learning plans (504, IEP, etc.)
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
13. My district ensures that there are opportunities for professional development on how to use available resources and programs meant for ELLs each year.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree

- Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
14. What support do you currently receive from your district or school building to help provide effective instruction to ELLs?
15. What supports do you think teachers would most benefit from when planning effective instruction of ELLs?

Effectiveness

16. I am proficient in my understanding of how to incorporate modifications and accommodations listed in my ELL students' ILPs into my instructional and assessment plans.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
17. I am in successful in incorporating modifications and accommodations listed in my ELL students' ILPs into my instructional and assessment plans.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree nor Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
18. Is your teaching of ELLs effective? Why or why not?
19. What do you use to measure the effectiveness of your instruction of ELLs?
20. In your opinion, what do you believe has the greatest positive impact on the success of ELLs?
21. In your opinion, what do you believe has the greatest negative impact on the success of ELLs?

Teaching Strategies

22. What resources and programs have you used in the classroom to support ELLs? Select all that apply.
- Snap&Read
 - Imagine Learning: Language and Literacy
 - Imagine Learning: Reading
 - Imagine Learning: Math
 - Imagine Learning: Math Facts
 - Co:Writer
 - Grammarly
 - PowerPoint Subtitles

- EdPuzzle
- Nearpod
- Google Translate
- Other: Please Specify

23. What instructional strategies and supports have you used in the classroom to support the learning of ELLs? Select all that apply.

- Visual Aids
- Realia
- Translated Materials
- Modeling
- Demonstrations
- Hands-on Activities
- Graphic Organizers
- Word Walls
- Multicultural Content
- Small Group Discussion
- Partner Discussion
- Sufficient Wait Time After Questioning
- Closed Captioning/Subtitles
- Voice Typing
- Gestures
- Dictionary
- Microphone/Voice Amplification
- Other: Please Specify

24. What is your favorite resource to use with ELLs? Why?

25. What is your favorite teaching strategy to use with ELLs? Why?

Appendix C

International Review Board (IRB) Approval



AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Date: 5/12/2022

22-024: TITLE OF PROJECT: Case study: Middle school content teachers' experiences with supporting second language acquisition of ELLs

Re: Revised Application IRB 22-024

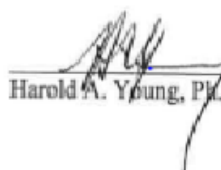
Dear Dr. Barnes and Ms. Paladino,

We appreciate your cooperation with the human research review process. This letter is to inform you that the amendment to study 22-024 was reviewed on an expedited level. It is my pleasure to inform you that your revised study has been approved.

This approval is subject to APSU Policies and Procedures governing human subject research. The IRB reserves the right to withdraw approval if unresolved issues are raised during the review period. Any changes or deviations from the approved protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB for further review and approval before continuing.

This approval is for one calendar year and a closed study report or request for continuing review is required on or before the expiration date, 5/11/2023. If you have any questions or require further information, please contact me by phone (931-221-7059) or email youngh@apsu.edu.

Sincerely,



Harold A. Young, Ph.D. Chair, APIRB

Appendix D

Recruitment Letter

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

My name is Vanessa Paladino, and I am an education specialist candidate at Austin Peay State University.

I am writing this email to invite you to participate in a research study regarding your experience with teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) in your content area classroom. The purpose of this study is to explore the teaching strategies used by middle school content teachers to support English language learners. In addition, it will seek to examine middle school content teachers' perceptions of their ability to effectively teach English language learners.

The study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Austin Peay State University Institutional Review Board.

This study will be conducted during the spring and summer of 2022. During that time, I will collect and analyze data. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a 25-item questionnaire using Google Forms, which is expected to take 15-20 minutes to complete. Your questionnaire responses will be anonymous.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you choose whether to participate. If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop your participation at any time. Participation or non-participation will have no bearing on your employment or future opportunities.

By participating in this study, you will provide insights into the perceptions of and experience with teaching ELLs. This study could provide a framework for incorporation of future professional development opportunities and support to ensure success of this population of students.

If you are interested in participating, please use this link to review the Informed Consent document and upon agreement, proceed to complete the survey:

Case Study: Middle School Content Teachers' Experiences with Supporting Second Language Acquisition of ELLs

Please feel free to reach out to me anytime if you have any questions about the research. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix E

Participant Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Case Study: Middle School Content Teachers' Experiences with Supporting Second Language Acquisition of ELLs

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education Specialties at Austin Peay State University supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You retain the right to refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you consent to participate in this study, you may withdraw from this study at any time without consequence. If you choose to withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this department, the services it may provide to you, or Austin Peay State University.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore the teaching strategies used by middle school content teachers to support English language learners. In addition, it will seek to examine middle school content teachers' perceptions of their ability to effectively teach English language learners.

PROCEDURES

You are being asked to participate in a questionnaire related to your experience as a teacher of English Language Learners (ELLs) in a content classroom setting. After providing your digital signature, you will be taken to the questionnaire. The questionnaire will remain open for 14 business days. You will be sent reminders after five and 10 business days. The questionnaire is expected to take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

RISKS

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS

Benefits of this study include a contribution to previous research collected in regards to the roles of ESL and content teachers in the middle school setting and the use of effective instructional resources and strategies intended to help aid language acquisition in sheltered instructional settings for ELLs. The findings have the potential to provide insight of the perceptions of middle school teachers with experience teaching ELLs and provide a framework for incorporation of future professional development opportunities and support to ensure success of this population of students.

COMPENSATION

Participants will not receive compensation.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Austin Peay State University Institutional Review Board. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT

You are not required to sign this Consent and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to participate in any programs or events of Austin Peay State University or any services you are receiving or may receive from Austin Peay State University. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, any collected data will be destroyed and not used.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

If you have any questions about the procedures, you may direct them to the principal investigator, Vanessa Paladino.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and received a copy of this form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions regarding my participation in this study. I agree to take part in this study as a research participant.

By my digital signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and a student at Austin Peay State University.

Print Participant's Name Date

Participant's Signature Date

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION:

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