2020

Best Approaches for English Acquisition With Primary English Language Learners

Roxanna Gario
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Roxanna Leonie Gario

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Review Committee
Dr. Kim Nisbett, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Lynn Varner, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Tammy Hoffman, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2020

Abstract

The education reform that took place in the emirate of Abu Dhabi set the standard that all students attending state-governed schools would be literate in their native language of Arabic as well as English, which was being taught in schools as a second language. However, school data documented achievement gaps in English reading among English language learners (ELLs) at a primary school in Abu Dhabi. The purpose of this study was to investigate the best approaches used by English medium teachers to teach reading to ELLs in order to provide recommendations for student improvement. Guided by Krashen's monitor model, this study included an examination of the best approaches used by English medium teachers that help ELLs achieve success in English reading. This was achieved by examining how English medium teachers approached teaching reading to ELLs with the guiding question of asking what do English medium teachers perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs. In this qualitative case study, data were collected by conducting interviews with teachers; then, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. It was concluded that reading assessments, phonics instruction, use of visuals, small group instruction, and vocabulary instruction were the perceived best practices used by teachers to approach teaching English to ELLs. It was also concluded that teachers were not receiving consistent training in teaching ELLs, and they did not have access to effective ELL resources. A white paper was created to highlight the problem of low reading achievement and to make recommendations to the school district. The results from this study could lead to improved instructional standards for teaching ELLs, which could positively impact social change by increasing English reading proficiency levels among ELLs.

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Dedication

My life-changing journey that produced this research is dedicated to my mom and the memory of my father. You both instilled in your children a sense of hard work and perseverance that I used to sustain me on my doctoral journey. Thank you for supporting me and believing in me that I would complete my doctoral degree.

Acknowledgments

First, I give thanks to God for the wisdom and strength to complete this doctoral journey. I also want to thank my family and friends who supported me by taking a genuine interest in my work and supplying me with encouraging words. I extend a heartfelt thank you to my mother and stepmother for always asking me about my progress and praying for me the whole way through.

Next, I want to thank all of my Walden professors, committee members, URR, and editing staff for the work and effort they put in towards helping me achieve my goal. I am blessed to have interacted with them on my doctoral journey as they have all made positive contributions to the scholar that I am today.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a country made up of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Al Ain, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khamiah, and Fujairah. The UAE is also a country that has experienced rapid development of land and human capital since its formation as a nation in 1971, under the leadership of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayyan (Sowmya, Chandrasekaran, & Patterson, 2018). This rapid development was largely due to the country's vast wealth in oil and gas that is primarily situated in the emirate of Abu Dhabi (Sowmya et al., 2018). Since the onset of the country's rapid development, there has been an initiative to further develop human resources in order to lessen the reliance on oil as a means of capital gain.

The leaders of Abu Dhabi understood that oil alone could not sustain the livelihood of the country. One of the goals of the late Sheikh Zayed was that all children be prepared for a new and modern world (Baker, 2017). The leaders of Abu Dhabi, much like those of other governments, realized that for their country to thrive throughout the generations, they must equip their students with 21st century skills (Eranpalo, Jorgenson, & Woolsey, 2016). Adopting 21st century skills would enable their students to compete globally by being able to communicate in their native language as well as English, the language most commonly used worldwide for doing business (Cogo & Yanaprasart, 2018). It would also help students meet the country's goal of developing the skills and talents of its citizens.

In 2010, the Abu Dhabi Education Council initiated the new school model, a school reform that established a biliterate curriculum across all government schools in Abu Dhabi (Eranpalo et al., 2016). The reform was part of the UAE Vision 2021 and Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 as a plan to move away from the heavy reliance on oil as a means of revenue and equipping native citizens with the skills and knowledge needed to perform jobs that have been maintained by nonnative employees (Ryan, 2016). The reform restructured the curriculum from being delivered only in the native language of Arabic to setting the expectation that students be able to read, communicate, and comprehend in both English and Arabic with a high degree of proficiency (Baker, 2017; Eranpalo et al., 2016). However, according to the 2016 end-of-year test results for English literacy, students performed below the standards set by the school council. The results were evident that more work needed to be done in order to achieve student success in English proficiency.

Local Setting

The target school is set in a suburban area between two major cities where commerce and finance are the major industries. The area where the school is situated currently experiences major residential and commercial building development. The population of the school is made up of local girls from first grade through fifth grade. The staff is also made up of all females from culturally diverse backgrounds. The majority of the teaching staff is local, and the remaining staff consist of teachers from six different countries. Until 2010, all the subjects taught in school, including reading, math, science, writing, Islamic studies, social studies, technology, art, music, and physical education,

were taught using the language of Arabic (Eranpalo et al., 2016). English language was included in the academic curriculum as a medium for teaching the subjects of reading, math, and science (Jorgenson, Eranpalo, Deria, & Kumar, 2017).

Gap in Practice

The goal of the Abu Dhabi Education Council is to increase student achievement and support the development of bilingual students (Eranpalo et al., 2016). In order to accomplish this goal, all students upon completion of Grade 12 have to be proficient in English. *Proficient* means being able to speak, read, and write in English at levels of 80% and above, as measured by the External Measurement of Student Achievement (EMSA) school assessment. The EMSA test is a standardized test that is given every year in the spring. After the test, the results are generated and issued to schools so that administrators can monitor student progress and plan school needs based on the results.

The target school's end-of-school year exam results in English for the 2015-2016 school year revealed that students underperformed in English reading. Of the 372 students who took the exam, only 74% of students passed with a score of A or B. The results of the 2015-2016 end-of-school year exam in English revealed that the percentage of students who passed with a score of A or B dropped by 3% from the previous school year.

The target school set a school improvement goal for the reading EMSA to facilitate and actualize its improvement plan. According to the school improvement plan, the goal was to increase the percentage of students scoring an A or B on the EMSA English reading by 10% from the previous year. Teachers were required to use school-

issued reading books and implemented a guided reading cycle as strategies to increase English literacy skills. This was part of the school improvement plan to help achieve the 10% increase in the number of students scoring A or B.

However, during the 2015-2016 school year, peer teacher observations revealed that teachers were not following an established guided reading structure. According to the English head of faculty, each teacher approached the teaching of reading in a non-structured way. Their main focus was on covering the curriculum and not on getting students to increase in English reading, which could have contributed to low student scores. Without a structured school-wide strategy that was consistently followed for addressing English literacy, the likelihood of student success would be reduced.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

According to the 2015-2016 EMSA results, 74% of the third, fourth, and fifth grade students who took the English reading EMSA scored an A or B, which left a gap of 26% of the third, fourth, and fifth grade student population who barely passed or did not pass. Subsequently, the 2016-2017 EMSA results revealed that 71% of the third, fourth and fifth grade students scored an A or B, leaving an increased gap, from the previous year, of 29% of students who barely passed or did not pass the end-of-year English reading test. In observing the pattern of achievement in the test results for the past 2 years, if nothing is done to address the gap in English reading, then the pattern of decline will most likely continue.

During peer teacher observations, teachers in the target school discovered that the English language learner (ELL) teachers were not following a structured guided reading program with their ELL students. Teachers voiced their concerns about the lack of access to reading materials that were suitable for their ELLs. The English head of faculty for the target campus noted that the reading curriculum was aspirational in that it set a high standard of achievement, but it was not well suited for the ELLs of the school because the curriculum did not account for their current levels of English. Based on feedback from the peer teacher observations and school testing data, teachers at the target school felt that ELLs did not successfully acquire English reading on an academic level. The problem of low student achievement in English reading by ELLs, measured by the end-of-year English reading assessment, was shared by both teachers and school administrators. Teachers and school administrators of the target school agreed that the gap in English reading achievement needed to be addressed in order to achieve higher results on the reading EMSA and to continue the growth in English reading. The purpose of this study was to find the best research-based approaches currently used by ELL teachers to help ELLs increase their academic achievement in English reading.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The professional literature on second language learners revealed that learners worldwide also struggle with attaining a strong proficiency in English reading. Finding the right approach to teaching students with a first language other than English is a global issue (Hansen-Thomas, Grosso Richins, Kakkar, & Okeyo, 2016; Stone, 2018; Xerri, 2016). In the United States, according to the National Assessment of Educational

Progress (NAEP) report by Bandeira de Mello, Rahman, and Park (2018), a large majority of ELLs performed below the basic level in reading. Assessment data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) also confirmed low scores among ELLs on national and state assessments (McFarland et al., 2018). In current research on ELL reading readiness, data revealed that many teenage ELLs were only able to comprehend English on a limited level (McCormick & Segal, 2016). These data indicated that younger ELLs were not mastering English in the primary grades, thus entering the upper grades at a great disadvantage for English reading. According to a study by Cardimona, Smith, and Roberts (2016), the younger students are when they start to learn a second language, the more successful they are at becoming proficient in that language.

In the United States, the number of ELLs has greatly increased over the last 10 years, and it is projected that the number of ELLs will continue to increase (de Jong, Naranjo, Li, & Ouzia, 2018). The rise in the number of ELLs has created a challenge for teachers in how to educate them effectively when English is not their first language (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016). Educators in other countries where English is the primary language of instruction have also experienced challenges with the increase of students whose primary language is not English (Stone, 2018). In Canada, the population of students who come from homes where English is not the first language has increased due to an influx of new immigrants (Fang, Neil, Brake, & Sapeha, 2018). It is expected that the population of immigrants in Canada will continue to increase over the next 25 years. In addition to the challenges that ELLs face with learning a new language, they may also face other challenges such as adapting to a new culture and school system, exclusion, and

low self-esteem, just to name a few, that teachers have to be prepared to handle (Fang et al., 2018). Research conducted in the United Kingdom by Demie (2018) also revealed an increase in the number of ELLs enrolled in schools, causing researchers to devote more effort to how to teach this population of students effectively. Whiteside, Gooch, and Norbury (2017) reported large achievement gaps between primary ELLs and native English-speaking students in schools in England. The previously mentioned research concluded that ELLs are a rapidly growing population of students worldwide and the need to educate them effectively is an issue that all school stakeholders should address.

Definitions

The definitions to key words and phrases that are used in the study are listed below. These definitions are provided to bring clarity to the study:

English language learners (ELLs): ELLs are students whose primary language is not English. They are challenged with learning an academic curriculum and achieving success in a language that is not their first language (Paradis, 2016; Pollard-Durodola, 2017; Villegas, 2018).

English medium teacher (EMT): A teacher who teaches the curriculum in English to ELLs (Eranpalo et al., 2016; Liu & Evans, 2016).

L2: Second language learner (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018).

Significance

In many nations around the world, English is taught in school as the academic medium. This is because in today's global world, English is an essential tool for international communication (Martins, 2017). According to the 2018 English First

English Proficiency Index for Schools report, despite efforts by teachers to teach students using the medium of English and the money spent on education, students in Middle Eastern countries have low levels of English proficiency when compared with other countries where students are also learning English as an additional language (Education First, 2018). Results from the most recent Programme for International Student Assessment from 2015 also showed low rankings for students in reading, math, and science in Middle Eastern countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016a). These results support the need for improvements in all English medium subjects in order for schools in Abu Dhabi to compete successfully with schools on an international level.

The initiatives that educators implement today will impact the future development of a country. High achievements in reading, science, and math can help to predict the future economic stability of a country (OECD, 2016b). English is the language most often used in the business worldwide (Cogo & Yanaprasart, 2018). It would be cost effective for the economy of a country to use human capital from its own country rather than to import human capital from other countries to conduct business for them in English (Martins, 2017). Investing in students to help them attain proficiency in English could offer great returns for a country in the future because it would not have to rely on outside resources for its sustainability.

Based on the 2016 EMSA results for the target school, English reading achievement was low. The district reading program consisted of multivolume reading books for Grades 1-5, a phonics kit, and multileveled reading books for small group

reading instruction. However, there was no structured plan for how teachers should use the reading resources to help ELLs acquire English. With teachers from different countries, reading lessons were taught according to how teachers were trained in their home country. The English medium teachers (EMTs) found it very challenging to teach reading to ELLs who barely comprehended what they were trying to teach. The purpose of this study, then, was to help increase English reading achievement among ELLs by finding out what research-based strategies teachers used to approach reading when working with ELLs to help them acquire English. The data gained from the study can be used to increase teacher knowledge about the best approaches used in teaching ELLs. Teachers could apply the knowledge gained from the study by incorporating it into their daily teaching, with the expected result of increased academic achievement among all ELLs.

Guiding Research Question

The results from the end-of-year English reading exams for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years showed a gap in performance among ELL students in English literacy. The question that guided the qualitative study was as follows: What do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs? This question provided the insight needed to address the issue of low performance in English reading among ELLs.

This qualitative study included an investigation of the local problem of low student achievement in English reading. This study also included an exploration of concepts and processes in order to get a deeper understanding of the views of the

participants (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The investigation focused on the research-based strategies EMTs used to approach reading that resulted in student achievement gains. The data collected were combined with current research to come up with the best approaches that benefit ELL students at the target school.

Review of the Literature

In conducting the literature review, I used the following databases to saturate the literature: ProQuest, ERIC, EBSCO, Sage Journals, and Google Scholar. These databases were used to retrieve scholarly, peer-reviewed, full-text articles that were written within the last 5 years. The terms used to search for the articles were *helping English language learners with reading comprehension, ELLs and reading, teaching ELLs, teacher attitudes, teacher preparedness, preservice teachers and ELLs,* and *approaches to teaching ELLs.* The review of literature highlighted three key factors in the success of ELLs acquiring English as a second language: (a) reading strategies for ELLs, (b) teacher attitude towards teaching ELLs, and (c) teacher preparedness for teaching ELLs. These factors provided insight into how students best acquire English as a second language.

Krashen's Monitor Model

The conceptual framework that guided the study was Krashen's monitor model, a second language acquisition theory that consists of five hypotheses: acquisition learning hypothesis, natural order hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, input hypothesis, and affective filter hypothesis (Mani, 2016). According to Mani (2016), Krashen's monitor model explains two ways in which students develop language skills. The first way is by learning, and the second way is by acquisition. Language learning is being conscious of

grammar rules and is only useful as an editor. In contrast, acquisition is picking up a language the natural way by developing the ability to communicate in authentic situations. Krashen's monitor model indicates that language acquisition, not language learning, is responsible for proficiency in a second language (Mani, 2016), which implies that language acquisition is one of the most important ways that people gain language skills.

Krashen's monitor model was chosen as the conceptual framework because it focuses on second language learners and the best way for them to acquire a second language. Krashen's monitor model was also chosen because it was characterized as being simple for teachers to understand and easy to apply in the classroom with ELLs (Bossé, Bayaga, Ringler, Fountain, & Young, 2018; Shi & Ariza, 2018). This is important to note because teachers of ELLs were the target population for the study.

While Krashen's monitor model consists of five hypotheses, this study only included a focus on the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis to examine the guiding research question: What do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs? The input hypothesis stated that people acquire language by understanding information or input that is a little above their current level of understanding (Krashen, 2017a; Mani, 2016; Xu, 2016). The input hypothesis was selected because other researchers have used it to explain how second language learners acquire language, thus supporting its credibility among other researchers (see Bossé et al., 2018; Chinkina & Meurers, 2016; Huang, 2019).

The input hypothesis helped to answer the research question because it states that L2 students acquire language by comprehending input that is a little above what they understand, and that they use meaning to help acquire, not learn, language. The implication is that not only should the input be comprehensible but also challenging, relevant, and engaging (Chinkina & Meurers, 2016; Mason & Krashen, 2019). The implications for the input hypothesis is that listening comprehension and reading should be the major focus in a language program because that is where the majority of a learners' input comes from (Krashen, 2017b; Xu, 2016). Although a heavy emphasis is on listening and reading, Krashen (2017a) made mention that speaking and writing fluency skills should not be ignored. Speaking and writing fluency are developed naturally after the learner has built up the capacity to speak and write fluently through comprehensible input.

The affective filter hypothesis was used in conjunction with the input hypothesis in answering the research question. The affective filter hypothesis stated that L2 student attitudes are directly linked to success in L2 acquisition (Xu, 2016). The way students feel about themselves, their environment, and their ability to succeed in school is linked to their success in acquiring a second language (Çetin, Griffiths, Özel, & Kinay, 2016). Xu (2016) stated that students with good self-image, who are self-motivated and have low levels of anxiety, generally do well at acquiring a second language. Therefore, the input and affective filter hypotheses connect well with each other because in order to acquire new information, a low anxiety environment must be established where students feel safe and take risks in their learning.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is vital for all learners who want to achieve academic success. Habib (2016) defined reading comprehension as the ability to decode words automatically and be able to follow along with the sequence of events in a story, identify main ideas, make inferences, and draw conclusions. Multiple studies have linked the different components of reading, such as decoding, fluency, phonics, and vocabulary, with reading comprehension success among ELLs (Landon, 2017; van Steensel, Oostdam, van Gelderen, & van Schooten, 2016).

Decoding. In their review of major findings in reading comprehension, McNamara and Kendeou (2017) highlighted research that supported the link between decoding skills and reading comprehension. Landon (2017) also supported the link between decoding and comprehension. In her study of third and fifth grade ELLs, Landon found that decoding skills in the third graders were strong predictors of their reading comprehension ability. This was supported by van Steensel et al. (2016), who stated that the relationship between decoding and reading comprehension was the strongest during the early stages of reading development, but could dwindle as students continue through primary school.

Fluency. Fluency and reading comprehension are closely connected (Rasinski, Rupley, Pagie, & Nichols, 2016). Fluent readers can comprehend better than nonfluent readers because they do not have to spend their time decoding words, which could distract from comprehension (Landon, 2017). In their study of direct fluency instruction and repeated readings (RR) among ELLs, Coronado, Gelrud, and Rodriguez (2017) found

that RR helped to build students' reading fluency, which in turn led to an increase in their reading comprehension.

RR involves students rereading a story multiple times to increase their reading speed and to develop their reading comprehension (Ardoin, Binder, Foster, & Zawoyski, 2016). In a synthesis of the research on reading comprehension, Stevens, Walker, and Vaughn (2017) reported that RR produced gains in reading fluency and reading comprehension among elementary students with learning disabilities. Learners who read text more than once could increase their understanding of text by being able to process fully what they read and engage more with the text vocabulary. Similar results were found by Landa and Barbetta (2017), who explored the effects of RR on reading fluency and comprehension of elementary-age ELLs with learning disabilities. They found that the participants' word-per-minute count increased after the RR interventions, and they also concluded an improvement in comprehension (Landa & Barbetta, 2017). These findings were supported by Taguchi, Gorsuch, Lems, and Rosszell (2016) who, through numerous years of research on ELL RR, concluded that RR was an effective method for increasing reading fluency. The above findings supported the impact that RR have on ELL reading comprehension and could encourage teachers to take the time to teach students about the important role that RR have on their reading comprehension ability.

Phonics. Not many current studies were found in the literature that explicitly addressed phonics strategies. In fact, multiple studies supported teaching phonics in conjunction with other reading components, such as reading fluency, as an approach to helping struggling readers (Rasinski et al., 2016). In a study by Gomez (2016), first grade

students who were explicitly taught phonics made significant gains in reading fluency. These results further supported the link between fluency and phonics in helping students to develop strong reading skills.

Vocabulary. Strategies that focused on vocabulary retention were common among the literature. Previous research supported vocabulary teaching as one of the best approaches to helping ELLs gain proficiency in English (Gibson, 2016; Snyder, Witmer, & Schmitt, 2017). Vocabulary knowledge is an essential skill for learners to have so that they can communicate effectively in any language (August, Artzi, & Barr, 2016). Researchers have claimed that using explicit vocabulary instruction when teaching ELLs has had a positive impact on their reading skills (August et al., 2016; Loftus-Rattan, Mitchell, & Coyne, 2016).

Loftus-Rattan et al. (2016) supported the use of explicit vocabulary teaching. They investigated the effects of storybook vocabulary instruction with preschool students, of whom the majority spoke a language other than English at home. Loftus-Rattan et al. conducted three different types of vocabulary instruction with all of the students. The students listened to the same story read out loud 3 times during the week. Then, they participated in word activities that varied based on the instructional conditions. According to the design of the study, when the teacher used incidental exposure, students did not receive additional instruction about the words in the story. However, when embedded instruction was used, the words also appeared in the story, and the teacher included additional instruction about the words. The additional instruction included hearing the definition of the words, hearing the definition in the context of the

story, and repeating the vocabulary words in unison. Also, prior to reading the story, the teacher highlighted key words for students to listen for and raise their hand when they heard the key vocabulary words. Further, extended instruction included the same elements of embedded instruction with the addition of an oral emphasis on the vocabulary words. This was conducted through oral language activities after each reading of the book (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2016). The successful use of repetition demonstrated in the repeated exposure to vocabulary words and listening to the same story read out loud multiple times in a week were similar to the findings in the study by Landa and Barbetta (2017), who supported the use of RR as an effective reading comprehension strategy. Loftus-Rattan et al. concluded that extended instruction yielded the highest gains on word learning because of the intensity of that instructional condition. Mirroring the results of Loftus-Rattan et al. (2016), August et al. (2016) also concluded favorable results from the use of extended instruction. They supported the use of embedded instruction because of its effectiveness in helping ELLs acquire academic vocabulary while using less instructional time. These findings have significant implications for teachers of ELLs to incorporate more explicit instruction of English vocabulary into their reading program.

The research on vocabulary teaching also contained studies that recommended the use of vocabulary instruction in conjunction with other teaching strategies (Graham, Graham, & West, 2017; Snyder et al., 2017; Swanson, Orosco, & Kudo, 2017). Alabsi (2016) agreed that a multicomponent strategy approach to teaching vocabulary would yield effective results for English acquisition among ELLs. In her study, Alabsi investigated the use of role play in teaching and its effect on the vocabulary acquisition of

girls at a secondary school. The teachers in the experimental group were instructed to present and discuss new vocabulary in various ways such as with the use of pictures, questioning, pronunciation, repetition, meaning, and spelling. The results showed that role play was an effective strategy in enhancing student vocabulary proficiency as the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group who did not participate in any type of role play activities (Alabsi, 2016). Similarly, Swanson, Orosco, and Kudo (2017) found that instructional strategies that included a combination of grammar, spelling, and vocabulary had a positive impact on ELL reading skills.

The use of translation as a strategy to help ELLs acquire English did not appear often during the review of current literature, but its potential effectiveness as a vocabulary acquisition strategy is important to note (Cardimona et al., 2016; Moore, 2017). In their case study, de Oliveira, Gilmetdinova, and Pelaez-Morales (2016) found that learners benefited more in vocabulary acquisition when the teacher switched between students' first language and English. Similar results were concluded by Moore (2017), who investigated the effects of translation strategies on ELL academic progress. Tutors used translation strategies such as simplifying, breaking down, and rephrasing vocabulary words when working with their ELL students. They also used their limited knowledge of their students' first language to translate the English content, making it accessible to their students. The approach of using a learner's first language to support the acquisition of a second language is supported by Krashen's input hypothesis (Mani, 2016). The input that a learner received was guided so that the learner could make meaning out of the

information. Overall, the use of translation as a strategy to help ELLs with vocabulary acquisition could prove to be a beneficial classroom practice.

Teacher Attitude

Teachers have the job responsibility of making sure that all learners achieve academic success. Some teachers are motivated by the challenging makeup of their diverse student populations and find creative ways to deliver lessons that meet the needs of all learners. However, there are teachers who feel that the responsibility of a linguistically diverse student population is too challenging. They do not understand how to teach ELLs successfully and keep up with a curriculum that requires students to learn vast amounts of knowledge in a short period of time (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2016; Nieto, 2017). The way teachers understand and approach the content and their attitude towards the students they teach directly impact student learning (Harrison & Lakin, 2018). According to research by Kraut, Chandler, and Hertenstein (2016), teacher attitudes have been linked to student achievement. Teacher attitudes set the tone for the type of learning environment in which students will be submersed for the duration of the school year. Xu (2016) suggested that teachers should strive to cultivate positive class environments by lowering the affective filter or negative emotional factors. Lowering the affective filter could likely encourage students to receive more input, interact with peers with confidence, and ultimately increase language acquisition.

Many ELLs enter school or go from one grade level to the next with limited English oral language skills. This leads ELL teachers to associate limited oral language with low academic achievement. If ELLs perceive that their teachers' perception of them

is low, then they are likely to approach learning with a low attitude (Kraut et al., 2016). Carley Rizzuto (2017) recommended that teachers not associate ELLs' limited oral language ability with low academic achievement. In a study by Fredricks and Warriner (2016), both teachers and native English-speaking students perceived the ELLs on their campus as low-performing students because of their limited English-speaking ability. The result was that the ELLs preferred to stay in the mainstream class rather than attend the English language development class that focused on helping students improve their English. The mainstream class was held at a higher level of learning than the English language development class that was perceived as the low class. A similar response from students was reported in a study by Liu and Evans (2016), in which ELLs wanted to learn English as quickly as possible so that they would be accepted by their native English-speaking peers and reduce their risk of getting teased or bullied.

There has been debate on whether ELLs should be able to use their first language while being taught in an English environment in school. In their study, Mellom, Straubhaar, Balderas, Ariail, and Portes (2018) investigated the effects of a culturally responsive instructional conversation pedagogy on teacher attitudes and ELL academic success. At the start of the investigation, Mellom et al. found that teachers had negative perceptions about students' home language. Some of the teachers felt that ELLs should speak English at school and at home because they lived in an English-speaking country. Fredricks and Warriner (2016) reported a similar attitude by teachers who enforced an English-only policy in their classrooms. The enforcement of the English-only policy was highly evident because students began to reprimand their peers and even the teacher

when English was not used in class. To further support this perception, Carley Rizzuto (2017) found that the teachers in this study also had negative attitudes towards ELLs' use of their first language at school, which was attributed to the teachers' lack of understanding second language acquisition. It was also revealed that while some of the teachers thought they were supportive of first language use in the classroom, they were observed enforcing an English-only rule in class and did not allow students to translate. Some of the teachers even felt that it was not their responsibility, but the responsibility of the English as a second language (ESL) teacher, to teach English to their ELLs. This teacher attitude was mirrored in an essay by Villegas (2018), who reported that when teachers lacked confidence in their ability to teach ELLs, they tended to shift the responsibility of teaching ELLs to the ESL teacher. Also, Carley Rizzuto (2017) noted that teachers were unwilling to receive professional development that could help them teach their ELLs effectively. The implications from these studies showed that teachers' attitudes towards language and language acquisition have a large impact on ELL academic success as well as how ELLs view themselves as individuals and learners.

While most of the current literature on teacher attitudes revealed negative or prejudiced attitudes towards ELLs, a few studies highlighted positive teacher attitudes towards working with ELLs. Despite the majority of teachers' negative views in Carley Rizzuto's (2017) study regarding ELLs, the author also pointed out that some teachers held positive views about ELLs and were open to enhancing their teaching skills in working with ELLs through purposeful ELL-focused professional development trainings. In their study of how a kindergarten teacher of ELLs used Spanish in the classroom,

de Oliveira et al. (2016) observed that the teacher made sure her students could access the lesson by using their primary language. After the teacher was sure that students understood the lesson in both languages, she enforced the use of English. This was a more balanced and positive approach to the English-only policies reported by Mellom et al. (2018) and Fredricks and Warriner (2016). The teacher showed, through her use of students' first language, that she valued the knowledge they had in their first language and was not afraid to step outside of her comfort zone to help her students not only acquire English vocabulary, but also comprehend the content being taught. It is important to note that the teacher in the study had recently completed an ELL licensure program showing her commitment to learning the skills and strategies necessary for working with ELLs.

Teacher Preparedness

Current research suggested that teacher preparation programs have not fully prepared teachers to teach academic content and English language simultaneously to ELLs (Gándara & Santibañez, 2016). In their study of preservice teachers of ELLs, Wessels, Trainin, Reeves, Catalano, and Deng (2017) reported that preservice teachers were not confident in working with ELLs. The preservice teachers lacked an understanding of how students learned a second language and also lacked training on research-based instructional strategies that benefit ELLs. In an annual survey conducted by the International Literacy Association (ILA), teacher preparation had the largest gap between importance and attention, suggesting that the topic was important to educators, but it was not receiving the attention it needed to match its importance (ILA, 2018).

It is not enough for teachers to have content knowledge. They must also possess other skills (Wessels et al., 2017). According to Ashton (2019), teachers must also be culturally and linguistically responsive in meeting the diverse needs of ELLs. Villegas (2018) noted that preparing teachers to work with ELLs must be a priority, and teachers should have some language background to engage and support ELLs in meeting academic demands.

The use of instructional strategies also surfaced as a topic in the research on teacher preparation. Hansen-Thomas et al. (2016) concluded that ELL teachers lacked training on research-based instructional strategies specifically for ELLs. Teachers relied on whole class strategies rather than differentiated approaches to target individual student needs. A similar finding was also reported in a study by Hegde, Hewett, and Terrell (2016), where teachers received training on strategies that could be used with ELLs even though ELLs were not the target audience of the training. Coady et al. (2016) also concluded in their study that teachers who worked in classrooms with small numbers of ELLs used whole class strategies. The use of ELL-specific strategies was rare. Consequently, since students were more likely to use the strategies explicitly taught by their teachers (Ness, 2016), it is important that general education teachers be trained in the use of effective strategies not just for a general population of learners but also for ELLs.

Student teaching and similar interactions with ELLs were addressed in the literature as a practice to prepare teachers to work with ELLs. Ortiz and Robertson (2018) and Wessels et al. (2017) suggested that teacher preparation programs should include

requirements that promote interactions between preservice teachers and ELLs. This would allow preservice teachers to gain an understanding of working with ELLs in a low-risk environment. It was also suggested that teacher preparation programs include study abroad opportunities where preservice teachers learn another language so that could experience what their students go through when learning an additional language (Ortiz & Robertson, 2018; Wessels et al., 2017). Hegde et al. (2016) found that even though preservice teachers felt that the coursework prepared them to teach ELLs, they did not realize how unprepared they were to teach ELLs until they interacted with them in the classroom. The teachers expressed that the experiences they gained in the classroom prepared them to work with ELLs.

Some teacher preparation programs were found to be innovative in their design. Li and Peters (2016) conducted a study of a K-12 teacher preparation program that fused traditional training with research and service. Mainstream teachers participated in workshop trainings and then used the strategies they learned with ELLs in the classroom. While in the classroom, the preservice teachers also generated research data that would be used to inform the decision-making process concerning ELLs. It was found that through this innovative use of classroom training and real-life application, preservice teachers improved their knowledge of second language acquisition and gained strategies for effectively working with ELLs. Also, it was discovered that the ELLs they worked with increased in academic achievement as measured through numerous assessment data and authentic writing samples. Similar results were echoed by preservice teachers in a study by Robertson, McFarland, Sciuchetti, and García (2017), who investigated

preservice teachers' experiences with cultural and linguistic diversity through field experiences that were connected to coursework. The preservice teachers reported that the greatest benefit of the program was the combination of coursework with fieldwork that linked theory with practice (Robertson et al., 2017).

Overall, the research supported the need for teacher preparation programs to better equip preservice teachers to meet the realistic demands of the ELL classroom. The main way to meet this need would be to plan courses purposefully and gear professional trainings specifically to working with ELLs and incorporating well-matched opportunities for in-class experiences (Li & Peters, 2016; Robertson et al., 2017). Further, the research on teacher preparation implied that follow-up in-class experiences were also necessary to allow more time for teachers to connect theory with practice and to feel at ease with working with ELLs (Hegde et al., 2016 ; Robertson et al., 2017; Wessels et al., 2017).

The current literature has addressed strategies and practices that have been successful in helping ELLs acquire English in the academic setting. However, more training for teachers on how to work with ELLs is still needed. According to Villegas, SaizdeLaMora, Martin, and Mills (2018), the studies and publications on preparing preservice teachers to work with ELLs have grown tremendously since the early 2000s, but gaps still exist. Additional qualitative research would enable the investigation of the best approach used by teachers in helping ELLs, specifically those at the primary age level, achieve academic success in English literacy.

Implications

The implications of this study could be beneficial to teachers who teach ELLs and ELL achievement by increasing the knowledge base on the topic of ELL reading. Hopefully, the data from the study can be used to help teachers in the target school support their ELL students in a way that would foster greater academic achievement in reading. The data from the study might warrant the need for professional development on ELL reading strategies or a white paper. A professional development session would allow the data from the study to be shared in a practical way so that ELL teachers would be able to take what they learned and immediately implement it with their ELL students. A white paper could provide the opportunity to inform administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders about the problem of low ELL reading achievement, the data that were collected from the study, and research-based suggestions of how to address the problem.

Summary

Section 1 focused on the problem of low English reading achievement scores among ELLs that existed in the target school. The data from the yearly standardized assessment revealed that students were consistently underperforming in English reading. The literature review added insight into the problem by revealing the strategies that were successful in helping ELLs acquire English in an academic setting. The literature review also discussed teacher attitudes and perceptions about teaching ELLs that revealed a significant link between teacher attitudes and student learning. Section 2 includes a discussion of the methodology that was used for the study. The type of study that was used was discussed as well as the reason for selecting it. Then, I elaborate on the

participants of the study and how the data were collected and analyzed. Lastly, I discuss how I accounted for the accuracy and credibility of the data collected.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

According to the school improvement plan for the target school, its goal was to increase the English reading achievement level among ELLs, as measured by the EMSA school assessment that was given at the end of the school year. The local problem that was the foundation for this project study was the gap between students who passed the English reading test with scores of A or B, compared with students who received scores less than B during the 2015 and 2016 academic school years. In order to increase scores, it was documented in the target school's school improvement plan that it would use the strengths of the teachers by holding professional development sessions throughout the school year where teachers presented the approaches they used in working with ELL students. It was also documented in the school improvement plan that teachers would continually assess students and analyze the data to keep track of student progress.

Qualitative research seeks to learn about a problem from the perspective of the participants in order to address the research question in hopes that the results will positively impact social change (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, a qualitative research design was used to gain knowledge about the best approach to take in helping ELLs achieve academic success in English (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Using a qualitative approach allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the problem from the perspective of the EMTs.

Description of the Case Study Tradition

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), in a qualitative study, a researcher seeks to explore a problem to gain meaning and understanding of a concept or process, also known as the phenomenon. Data are collected by conducting interviews, observations, or appropriate related documents, and they are based on the views of a small number of purposefully sampled participants (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The data analysis process is inductive and comparative as the researcher looks for themes to interpret the rich descriptive findings (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Creswell and Creswell (2017) described case study research as an investigation of an activity, event, process, or individuals by collecting data. Hancock and Algozzine (2016) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) agreed that case study research is a process of intensively analyzing a phenomenon to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon or problem being explored. According to Creswell and Creswell, qualitative case studies also allow the researcher to obtain data from interviews, ensuring that the phenomenon is explored in depth from multiple perspectives, which may help to bring about a /richer understating of the case. Hancock and Algozzine also described case study research as being richly descriptive, which allows for better insight into the views of the participants.

Justification for Qualitative Instrumental Case Study Design

According to Yin (2017), case study research is the preferred method when the researcher has no control over the behaviors that take place during the study, when the research question is a “how” or “why” question, and when the case being studied is

current. For the project study, I did not have any control over or manipulate the participants or the natural setting (see Yin, 2017). The issue that was studied—approaches used by EMTs when teaching ELLs in a foreign country—was a very current and relevant topic to investigate to help close the student achievement gap at the target school.

Case studies can be classified into three categories: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Researchers take on intrinsic studies when they are interested in the case itself (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Intrinsic case studies are exploratory and focus on the perceived interest in the case because the case presents an unusable or unique situation (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). According to Creswell and Poth, instrumental case studies involve the researcher targeting an issue or a concern and then selecting one bounded case to describe the issue. Also, instrumental case studies provide thick descriptions of the case being studied by using a specific case to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). The third type of case study is the collective case study, which involves studying multiple cases within a study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Collective case studies are multifaceted. This design includes several instrumental case studies. Its purpose is to address an issue while at the same time adding to the current knowledge base to understand a theory better (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Yin (2017) supported the use of collective case studies because studying more than one case can allow the researcher to analyze more cases in depth within and across research settings.

According to Hancock and Algozzine (2016), an instrumental case study could help the researcher gain a better understanding of the issue under investigation by being able to rely on participant insight for detailed data about the issue. The rationale for choosing an instrumental case study design was that this type of case study could be used to highlight the specific issue of the approaches used by EMTs to teach reading to ELLs in order to find the best solution to the problem of low academic achievement (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). Interviewing EMTs could help to enhance current understanding of the best approaches used in helping ELLs achieve academic success in English (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), using a case study design can help to advance knowledge in the field of education concerning the best approaches used to help ELLs achieve academic success because of the thick description that would come from the study.

Rationale for Not Selecting Other Qualitative Research Traditions

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described six different types of qualitative research strategies: grounded theory, phenomenology, basic qualitative research, narrative analysis, qualitative case study, and ethnography. Of the six different types of qualitative research strategies, the researcher rejected five as appropriate designs for the project study. Grounded theory was not chosen because the result of a grounded theory research design would be to develop a theory (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). The goal of the project study was not based on coming up with a theory; therefore, grounded theory was not selected. Phenomenology was not selected because phenomenology focuses “on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness”

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25). The aim of this project study was not to seek the lived experiences of participants who have all shared the same issue or phenomenon (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Moreover, ethnography was not the best choice for this study because it mainly focuses on "human society and culture" (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 29). Ethnography investigates the common patterns that exist within a culture, with the conclusion being a cultural portrait (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell, basic qualitative research is not classified as any specific type of qualitative study; it is generic in nature. The purpose of this kind of qualitative research "is to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Finally, narrative research was not chosen because narratives use stories as the main source of data (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Stories were not collected as a data source for this project study. Instead, the result of this project study was a rich description of the case that provided a deeper understanding of the best approach to helping ELLs achieve academic success in English.

Participants

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The population consisted of EMTs from seven different primary schools in the district. From the population of target schools, purposeful sampling was used to select 15 teachers in Grades 3 to 5 who taught ELLs. The criteria for selecting the teachers were the following: (a) third to fifth grade EMT, (b) taught for 2 years or more in the country of the target school district, (c) a native English speaker, and (d) teach reading to ELLs. These criteria ensured that the best data were collected to address the research problem of

how EMTs teaching in a foreign country approached teaching ELLs in a successful way. Grade 3 to 5 teachers were the most appropriate for the study because these grade levels took the standardized district test on which success in English is measured. The criteria did not include teachers who were new to the country because they would not have had enough experience teaching at the target school district to provide a rich description of the approaches they used with the ELL population of the target school district. As first year teachers, they would spend their first year becoming accustomed to the school setting, getting to know students and their culture, and receiving training on how to use the district curriculum. Native English language speakers were best suited for the project to ensure there was no miscommunication between the teacher participants and the researcher. Furthermore, because the project involved investigating the best approach used by EMTs in teaching ELLs to improve their English literacy passing rate, it was appropriate to select teachers with an extensive background in the use of English.

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the researcher emailed a letter of invitation (see Appendix B) and the consent form to the teaching staff who met the criteria. The letter of invitation explained the purpose of the study—to investigate the best research-based approaches used by EMTs in teaching ELLs in a foreign country. The informed consent form let participants know that their participation in the study was voluntary, and all information would be kept confidential. The deadline for teachers to reply to the invitation was 1 week from the time the email was sent. Teachers who agreed to participate in the study replied to the email with the words “I Consent” to signify their voluntary participation.

Justification for Number of Participants

Qualitative studies generally include few participants in order to obtain a rich descriptive understanding of the case. For qualitative research, Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested studying a few individuals. Having a large number of participants can make it more difficult to obtain a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied because of the amount of time it would require to collect and analyze data from a vast number of participants (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). This project study included 15 participants, which was considered an adequate number of participants to reach a point of saturation in answering the research question (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

The researcher sent a letter to the administrative office of the school district requesting permission to conduct research (see Appendix C). The school district approved the request to conduct research by issuing a letter of permission. Data were collected after approval from the Walden Ethics Board.

The principals of the target schools were contacted by email. The email was used to provide information about the research study and to schedule a time to meet in person. A copy of the letter of permission from the school district was also included in the email to principals. The face-to-face meeting with the principals provided an opportunity to discuss the research project and allowed the principals an opportunity to ask questions about the study. The face-to-face meeting also helped to put the principals at ease in knowing that all information collected would be kept confidential.

During the meeting with the principals, the researcher acquired permission to get a list of the names of the EMTs at the target schools, the grade levels they taught, and the number of years they taught in the country. The list of teachers was used to email the invitation letter to teachers who taught Grades 3-5 and who have taught in the country for at least 2 years. The consent form was also attached as a separate document to the email invitation. Teachers who volunteered to participate in the study responded to the email invitation. Access to teachers' email addresses was obtained through the district email system.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the use of an interview protocol (see Appendix D) was the primary method of data collection. The researcher contacted the participants by email to schedule face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Three of the 15 interviews were conducted in person and the remaining 12 interviews were conducted over the phone. Creswell and Poth (2017) suggested audiotaping interview questions and responses as a way to capture and store data. With the participants' consent, the research audio-recorded the interviews to obtain an accurate record of the interview conversations. Participants were also asked to participate in member checking after the data had been analyzed, and they all agreed. Creswell and Poth (2017) defined member checks as presenting draft materials to participants for accuracy of data. The member checks were carried out to lessen the chances of data misinterpretation.

Methods of Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

Establishing a good researcher-participant working relationship is vital to the success of the data collection process. The researcher was the English Head of Faculty

for the target school district during the data collection and data analysis process, but did not work with or supervise any of the participants who took part in the study. In order to establish a positive and open working relationship, the researcher communicated to all participants that their responses would be confidential and their identities would be made anonymous by the use of pseudonyms. It was also explained to the participants that their participation was voluntary, and they could discontinue their participation in the study at any time. The researcher's email address and phone number were made available to all participants if they had any questions or concerns about the interview questions, the interview process, or the study overall. All participants fully participated in the study.

Ethical Protection of Participants

EMTs were invited to take part in the study. EMTs who agreed to participate were informed that their participation was voluntary and there would not be any negative consequences for not participating in the study. After all the participants gave their informed consent, the researcher assigned a pseudonym instead of using their names during the study to protect their identity. Participants were identified by using consecutive numbers starting with the number one. With only 15 participants, numbers 1 through 15 were used to identify each participant anonymously (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). The target school was identified as School M to keep the identity of the school anonymous. All participants were informed about the research and its purpose, the potential risks and benefits, and their choice to discontinue the study at any time. Participants were also be informed that all information would remain confidential.

Data Collection

Justification for Data Collection Material

Data collection is an important aspect of a research project. Without data, the project has no credibility or validity. In a qualitative case study, data are collected from participants to learn about the phenomenon (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Many researchers have used interviews to gain relevant data about the topic under investigation. For this project study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather detailed information about the topic in a style that is similar to having a conversation (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). In the study by Kraut et al. (2016), interviews were used to collect detailed information about teacher attitudes towards working with ELLs and their training and professional development experiences.

Data were collected after approval from the IRBs of both Walden University and the school district of the target school. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), interviews are a common source of data collection for qualitative studies. The researcher first collected data by conducting expert panel interviews to test the interview protocol (see Appendix D) with EMTs who voluntarily agreed after they received an invitation letter (see Appendix E) and were not part of the study (see Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The research question and the literature review were used to develop the interview questions. Before the interview questions were used with the teachers participating in the study, a panel of EMTs in the district of the target school analyzed the interview questions on the interview protocol (see Appendix D) to make sure the questions were clear and appropriate for the study. The panel of EMTs consisted of teachers who were

not part of the study. EMTs who would not be taking part in the study were invited to analyze the questions on the interview protocol (see Appendix D) by sending them a letter through the use of email. The target teachers for the panel were teachers who taught Grades 3-5 because these were the grade-level teachers who made up the participants in the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), only a small number of individuals are needed to review and analyze the data collection instrument, so only two grade-level teachers from each of the target grade levels were a part of the panel. The purpose of the study and the panel was explained to the panel participants in a letter that was emailed to them. The panel participants were notified that their participation was voluntary. They were also asked for their consent to participate by replying to the email with the words "I Consent" to show that they did consent to be a part of the panel. Once the panel participants replied with their consent to participate, the researcher scheduled face-to-face and telephone interviews. Interview questions were typed out and a copy was given to each panel participant. A copy of the interview questions was emailed to panel participants who scheduled telephone interviews. During the review of the questions, the participants' feedback on the clarity and redundancy of the questions was documented. Panel participants were also asked to comment on whether the questions were true open-ended questions and appropriate for gaining information about teachers' feelings about English language education, their instructional practices in teaching ELLs, and demographic information about the participants (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). In order to help the panel participants give objective feedback about the interview questions, they were asked to think about the following questions before the start of the interviews:

1. Do the questions address how teachers feel about ELL education?
2. Do the questions address how teachers feel about teaching ELLs?
3. Are the questions clear and easy to understand?

After the interview with the panel, the feedback about the interview questions was that they were clear and appropriate, so no adjustments were made to the interview protocol.

Interviews, especially in education, are a common data source for qualitative studies (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The main use of case study research is to gather the descriptions and interpretations of others (see Yin, 2017). Although time-consuming, individual interviews provide the most information from the perspective of the participants being interviewed (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). The researcher held semi-structured one-on-one interviews with each participant in person or over the phone (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes. Participants were informed that the researcher anticipated only one interview; however, a second interview might be needed if the researcher felt the need to collect more data or clarify the data through the collection process. A second interview was not needed for any of the interviews.

An interview protocol (see Appendix D) was used to collect data from the participants. The interview protocol ensured that the data collection process was consistent and provided a record of the interviews (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). In addition to writing down participants' responses by hand, the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants using an audio recorder to ensure that the interviews were accurately captured (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). After each interview, the notes

were transcribed for analysis. The researcher used a computer program to store and organize the data until they were ready to be analyzed (see Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was to collect and interpret data from the panel review of the interview protocol and the participant interviews to get a clear understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, it was essential to use epoche and put aside prior beliefs or feelings about ELL education (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). When epoche is used, prejudgments and biases are set aside to see more clearly the phenomenon being investigated (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), reflexivity is the continuous process taken by the researcher to reflect critically on their actions and thoughts throughout the research process. Reflexivity was used to address transparency and help minimize researcher bias in the study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Having this strategy embedded in the research project helped to make sure that the data collected were as objective as possible.

Researcher Bias

Having bias about any aspect of a research investigation and not accounting for it could cause the findings to be deemed not only unethical but also invalid and not credible. Researcher bias was minimized by disclosing the experiences the researcher had with the phenomenon in order to bracket the information before the research began (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Having worked in the district for 7 years, the researcher was familiar with the administrative staff at some of the target schools, but had not worked

with any of the teachers in the study in a supervisory role. All participants were informed that they were to share their honest feedback during the interviews and that anything they said would be kept confidential.

Coming from a multilingual background, the researcher is an advocate for ELL education and values the ability to communicate in more than one language. ELL students should be given the opportunity to acquire English in an engaging and meaningful way. Through various conversations with ELL teachers, the researcher discovered that they felt dismayed by the lack of progress in English reading by their ELL students but did not really know what more they could do to help them advance. Teachers should be supported in helping ELLs acquire English in a way that does not put undue pressure on them to push students to learn English as quickly as possible. Ongoing training should be provided to ELL teachers on how to motivate and support ELLs in their acquisition of English reading from research-based practices.

Data Analysis

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), it is preferable to collect and analyze data at the same time. This is practical because the goal of data analysis is to make sense of the data. The more familiar one is with the data up front, the more it will make sense as one continues through the data collection process. Simultaneous data collection and analysis also provides for a more focused data set and helps to reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed with vast amounts of information that need to be processed at one time. Analyzing the data during collection in the form of capturing reflections, writing down possible themes, and making note of questions to ask helped to inform the next set of data

collected. Following this format allowed the data to be collected continuously, which helped with keeping the data organized (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

All data were analyzed using a combination of hand analysis and a computer software program. Creswell and Poth (2017) supported the use of hand analysis when analyzing a small database and when the researcher prefers to be close to the data for easy access. Data were also analyzed using the Microsoft Word Office 2016 computer program to store, back up, and organize the data for more efficient searches of specific text, as well as to serve as a way to check codes and themes (see Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Thematic analysis was the method used to analyze the data. Braun, Clarke, Hayfield and Terry (2019) described thematic analysis as a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within the data to find patterns of meaning. It is a flexible method because it can be used within various theoretical frameworks and provide a rich descriptive account of the phenomenon. During the first phase of thematic analysis, the researcher actively read and reread the data in search of patterns and their meanings. Braun et al. (2019) also recommended reading through the data at least once before coding so that a clear picture of the possible patterns can be identified and ideas for coding can be documented. The audio data from the interviews were transcribed after the interviews by converting the taped audio recordings into text data via the Microsoft Word 2016 computer program that typed, stored, and organized the data more efficiently. After the audio data were transcribed, the researcher verified the transcripts against the recordings for accuracy. The transcribed text for each participant was then further

organized by each interview question in a Microsoft Word 2016 document, allowing for a clearer picture of the data to recognize emerging patterns.

The next phase in thematic analysis involved generating codes. According to Braun et al. (2019) and Creswell and Poth (2017), codes are labels used to identify a segment of the data to form themes in the data. The data were manually coded and looked at in a systematic way (see Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Open coding was conducted by first reading carefully through all the transcripts and making notes in the margins of the transcripts about ideas that occurred during the readings (see Braun et al., 2019). Then the interview transcripts were explored and questioned to discover the underlying meanings. After that, notes were written down in a notebook. Then, the text segments that related to a single code were identified by categorizing them with code words to describe the meaning of the text segment (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). After each data set was coded, a list of code words was created to group similar codes and identify reoccurring codes. The list of code words was used to check against the data for new emerging codes that helped to group the codes into themes. Finally, the list of codes was reduced to three themes.

According to Braun et al. (2019), a small number of themes allows for a richer description of the phenomenon. Many themes lead to a lack of coherence of the story being told about the data. Themes should also be as specific and explanatory as possible (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Three themes were generated from the data: (a) perceived best practices used by teachers to teach ELLs, (b) professional development, and (c) resource use. No discrepant cases were found.

Data Analysis Results

Findings

The purpose of this case study was to find out EMTs' perceptions about the best approaches for improving English literacy among ELLs. This was done by conducting individual interviews with 15 EMTs. Three themes emerged from the data analysis. Each theme is discussed below to address the research problem.

Themes

Theme 1: Perceived best practices used by teachers to teach ELLs. During the interviews, 31 different practices were identified as being used among the teachers. The practices that were discussed the most among the participants as being effective were: use of visuals, vocabulary instruction, small group instruction, phonics instruction, and reading assessments. Table 1 displays the percentage of participants who reported using these practices.

Table 1.

Perceived Best Practices Used by Teachers

Practice	% of Participants Reporting Practice Use
Use of visuals	73
Vocabulary instruction	60
Small group instruction	67
Phonics instruction	73
Reading assessments	100

Use of visuals. A large majority of the participants mentioned in their interviews that they used visuals as a way to help their ELLs with English reading comprehension. It was the second highest reported practice used. Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 15 all reported that they used visuals during their lessons to help ELLs understand the meaning of vocabulary words or story text. When all participants were asked about the English training they had received, Participant 15 was the only one who mentioned during the interview that they attended a training that included the use of visuals as an approach to teaching ELLs. The use of visuals was not an explicitly used practice. The participants only mentioned the use of visuals but did not go into detail about how they used visuals with their students, unlike some of the other reported practices. When the participants were asked about what they did when students were not successful in English reading, only Participant 7 mentioned the use of visuals as part of the reteach or intervention process.

Vocabulary instruction. Participants 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 15 all reported the use of vocabulary instruction with their students. Participant 10 shared her process for teaching vocabulary words to her ELL students:

> I introduce some of the vocabulary which I know the students don't know. I write them on the board. I ask students to write them in their notebooks, and we read them together. And I give them maybe the part of speech, and I give the Arabic meaning also. (interview transcript, September 23, 2017)

Only one participant shared about using the students' first language, Arabic, to help them with their vocabulary acquisition. Participants 4, 6, 8, and 11 all mentioned building

students' vocabulary using high frequency words. Participant 15 taught vocabulary using an integrated approach. She found reading books that covered the science topics and taught the science vocabulary during the reading lessons.

Small group instruction. Small group instruction, working with predetermined groups of students rather than the whole class at once, was discussed by 10 out of the 15 participants. Participants 6, 7, 11, 12, and 14 described guided reading groups, in which they placed students in small groups based on their reading ability. Then the participants selected books that were best suited for their students' reading level in each group and worked with them on specific reading skills. This allowed the teachers to introduce students to challenging text on their individual reading levels. Participants 11 and 12 mentioned that they used the reading website Reading A-Z, for which the district purchased a yearly subscription, to access the leveled readers that students read during guided reading. Students also had their own individual access to the reading website to read the leveled books at home. In addition, Participants 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 12 utilized small group instruction to reinforce specific concepts that students struggled with during whole class lessons.

Phonics instruction. Phonics instruction was reported by 11 of the 15 participants, and they reported multiple ways in which they used phonics. Participants 5, 8, 11, 13 and 15 all used the phonics kit, Song of Sounds, provided by the district. Participants 8 and 11 specifically described how they used the phonics kit with their students. Participant 8 shared:

> For phonics we use Song of Sounds. So within Song of Sounds, the children listen to a song every day and there are different activities that they do along with the song. And it helps them to remember all of the sounds for each of the letters. (interview transcript, September 23, 2017)

Participant 11 stated:

> We start with the Song of Sounds and then sound out some words using the green cards. Then I take groups of similar abilities. When they are not working with me, the students learn their weekly spelling words, ten words each week with a different phonetic focus. (interview transcript, April 28, 2017)

Participants 6, 9, 10 and 13 assessed their students on phonics skills at least twice during the school year. Participant 3 was the only participant who stated that she specifically targeted phonics instruction when she met with students in small groups by selecting phonics-based reading books.

Reading assessments. All participants mentioned the use of reading assessments to measure and track student growth and progress. The most common assessment discussed by the participants was the baseline test given at the beginning of the school year to determine the reading skills that students already mastered. Nine of the participants used this practice. Participant 14 stated, “We do a skills test at the beginning…. It’s like a baseline, so it tells me what they know and what they don’t know.” Five of the participants assessed students using a running record, which consisted of the teacher listening to students read a leveled book, making notes of any reading errors, and then asking predetermined comprehension questions about the story to

determine the most suitable reading level text for students. Of those five, only Participants 3, 4, and 13 mentioned accessing the online version of the running records assessment through the website readinga-z.com, for which the district purchased a subscription. Not many participants mentioned spelling as a practice. Only two participants shared that they gave students weekly spelling tests, and one participant stated that she assessed her students on high frequency words once a term. The frequency with which the participants assessed students on their reading ability throughout the school year varied. Three participants assessed their students on a weekly basis. One participant assessed students on a biweekly basis, and two participants assessed their students monthly. Three of the participants shared that they assessed their students during the middle of the year, while six participants stated that they assessed their students' reading ability at the end of the year.

Theme 2: Professional development. The participants discussed their professional development training experiences. They shared the frequency with which they received training and discussed the type of trainings they received from the current district as well as past school districts and university training. Participants also discussed the effectiveness of the trainings they attended in the current district. Table 2 displays the professional development training frequency reported by the participants.

Table 2.

Professional Development Frequency

Frequency	% of Participants Attending
Weekly	13
Termly	60
Annually	7
Almost never	7
None	13

Frequency. The frequency of professional development training received in the current district ranged from weekly to none. Two of the 15 participants reported that they received training on a weekly basis. Participant 2 stated that the administrators at her school facilitated the professional development trainings every week. Nine participants reported receiving professional development training each term. Participant 5 stated, "We receive training throughout the year. There's three terms in a school year, so we have professional development training day about three times a term, so about nine times throughout the school year." Interestingly, five participants stated that they never received training in the current district on how to teach ELLs. Of the five participants who reported that they never received district training on how to teach ELLs, three stated that they received district training on non-ELL topics. This is significant because those participants said they felt the trainings should have been focused on ELL instruction to better equip them to support their ELL students. The remaining two of the five participants stated that they never received professional development training at all in

their current district. One participant reported that she almost never received professional training at her new school. Likewise, only one participant reported receiving professional development training once a year at the start of the school year.

Type of professional development training. The participants described various professional development trainings they attended. The trainings the participants described were on topics such as phonics, reading instruction, providing ELL strategies, and using the reading website subscription. Four of the 15 participants reported that they received phonics professional development training while in the current district. Participant 5 detailed her phonics training:

> So my last training that I attended was for the basal program…, and the name of it is Song of Sounds, and it's basically a phonics program that teaches the students how to pronounce the letter correctly. It also teaches them how to write their letters, and there's also some listening skills involved. (interview transcript, October 17, 2017)

Participant 14 shared how at a previous school, she trained teachers on how to teach reading. Participant 14 stated, "I was a Reading First coach. I coached other teachers on how to teach people how to read." She also shared that she had been trained in a previous district on how to administer running records reading and fluency assessments. Participant 11 discussed her ELL training and other English trainings she attended in the current district.

> When I first arrived … gave us some PD [professional development training] on how to best teach second language learners. This was over a couple of days. I

> have received PD on using specific programs within my classroom to support my teaching like Raz Kids and Brain Pop. I have also received a one-hour PD on using Café approach in our reading. (interview transcript, April 28, 2017)

Even though eight of the 15 participants mentioned using the reading website the district subscribed to, only two participants reported that they attended the training on how to use the website with their students.

Effectiveness of professional development trainings. The participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the professional development trainings they received in their current job varied. Table 3 displays these perceptions of the level of effectiveness of the professional development trainings. The two participants who reported they did not receive training were not included in Table 3.

Table 3.

Effectiveness of Professional Development Trainings

Level of Effectiveness	% of Participant Level
Very effective	15.40
Halfway effective	15.40
Not effective	69

Two of the participants thought the trainings were effective. Participant 9 stated, "It [professional development] was very effective because I'm actually utilizing some of the things that I learned in those trainings in my classroom right now since I wasn't actually trained to teach ESL [English as a second langage]." Some participants felt the trainings were halfway effective or somewhat ineffective. Similarly, two participants

thought the trainings were halfway effective and not focused specifically on supporting ELLs. Participant 8 discussed:

> I'm gonna go right down the middle with maybe fifty percent effective. 'Cause a lot of the things that I take away from the trainings are useful. But I have to make it useful for the English language learners. Um, I think that there could be a better job as far as focusing more on English language learners. So, if the trainings were actually focused, then I think they would help more. So that's why I go with fifty percent because I can apply it, but at the same time I wish that it was just more focused on solely English language learners. (interview transcript, September 23, 2017)

Similarly, Participant 12 stated, "The trainings have been a bit of a mixed bag. Few have provided sufficient to substantial support in developing best practice appropriate for ELLs in this region." Also, Participant 12 felt that colleagues sharing their practices in working with ELLs was a more useful form of professional development because it provided relevant approaches in working with their specific population of ELLs.

In contrast, nine participants reported that the trainings they received in their current district were not effective. Participant 1 expressed that the trainings were not effective, so she did her own research to support her ELL students. Likewise, Participant 6 stated, "It [professional development training] wasn't good because I was told [what] I already knew and what I was looking for was new information. Something other than what I already do and use." These statements by the participants showed the gap in response to teacher training needs in the area of ELL instruction.

Contrary to most of the participants, two of the 15 participants reported that they never received professional development training in their current position. Participant 13 reported that she did not receive professional development training. When asked why she had not received training, Participant 13 stated, "It's an education reform, so the focus is on a lot of things. They are not focusing on specific areas of the curriculum. The … expects us to use our prior knowledge and [prior] trainings." Participant 13 also discussed her experiences with professional development with the current school district:

> Much of the PD [professional development] is geared towards strategies better used with native English speakers. The focus in the last two years has been more on writing. During the first-ever "PD" week, we did receive several good ideas for ELLs such as reading around the room and buddy reading. Other PDs are often focused on math, science, or writing. (interview transcript, June 19, 2017)

Overall, most of the participants reported that they did not feel that the professional development trainings offered in their current district were effective. Participants 1, 6, 12, and 15 all reported that the professional development trainings they attended in the current district were not focused on how to teach ELLs; instead, they were focused more on general English instruction rather than targeted English instruction for ELLs.

Theme 3: Resource use. Resource use was a common topic among all participants. At least one participant made mention of resource use when responding to eight of the 10 interview questions asked. The participants shared the types of resources they used, and it was found that many of them used the same or similar resources. The top three resources used the most by the participants were the Reading A-Z website, the

Song of Sounds phonics program, and teacher-made resources. The top three resources used by the participants are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4.

Resource Use

Resource	% of Participant Usage
Reading A-Z	67
Song of Sounds	33
Teacher-made	33

Reading A-Z. Reading A-Z is an online library of leveled reading books for which the district purchased a 1-year subscription. All the teachers and students received a username and login to use at school and at home. It was found that 10 of the 15 participants used Reading A-Z with their students. The participants who used the website all agreed that it was a useful resource because students could access books at their individual reading level. However, Participants 1 and 3 shared the challenges they encountered with implementing the website in their classroom. Participant 1 shared that she used the website, but the subscription expired. This meant that the teacher and her students were no longer able to access the reading resources on the website. Participant 3 stated, "It [Reading A-Z] is difficult to implement as we do not have enough computer time [or] parental involvement for the at home portion." Even though Participant 3 stated the lack of parental involvement with implementing the Reading A-Z reading program with her students, Participants 10, 11, and 15 shared how their students accessed the

website from home. Participant 15 monitored and tracked her students' in-school and at-home use of Reading A-Z. She encouraged her students to use Reading A-Z at home by awarding homework points to students who accessed the website at home and completed the reading passages.

Song of Sounds. Song of Sounds was the phonics program purchased by the district for elementary school use. The teachers who used Song of Sounds were fewer than the teachers who used Reading A-Z. Participants 5, 8, 11, 12, and 13 reported that they used the Song of Sounds phonics program. All five participants who reported using Song of Sounds supported its use as an effective resource to help students learn phonics. Participant 8 stated that:

> We use song of sounds. So, within Song of Sounds, the children…listen to a song every day and there are different activities that they do along with the song. And it helps them to remember all of the sounds for each of the letters. This program is actually really effective. (interview transcript, September 23, 2017).

Even though Song of Sounds was not a resource that many participants used, those who did noticed improvements in their students' phonological ability.

Teacher-made resources. Some of the participants made their own resources. Five of the 15 participants reported that they made their own resources for ELLs to use in class. The resources described by the participants were hands-on, visual, and auditory types of resources. The main reason the participants made their own resources was because they felt the resources they were provided with were not relevant to their students.

Accuracy and Credibility of Findings

Triangulation, member checks, and external auditing were used to verify the accuracy and credibility of the findings. Triangulation was used to help limit the mistakes made during the interpretation of the data. Data from the interviews were compared and cross-checked with notes that were made in the margins of the transcripts about the codes and emerging themes as well as current literature (see Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) supported the use of member checks to allow participants to verify if the preliminary interpretations of the data were accurate representations of their experiences or offered suggestions to better capture their perceptions. The themes were confirmed through member checks to verify their validity within the data set. The participants were emailed the preliminary findings and asked for their feedback about the accuracy of themes that emerged from the interviews.

In addition to the use of triangulation and member checks, an external audit was conducted to ensure the greatest amount of accuracy and validity of the data collected and the accuracy of the interpretation of the findings (see Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended the use of an external audit because it could serve as a thorough review of the study by someone not associated with the project. Ms. Green (pseudonym) was the external auditor. She has been in education for 21 years working with ELLs and teachers. Her role at the time of the audit was Education Advisor for the Department of Education and Knowledge. Given her knowledge of the region and school district, Ms. Green's feedback was in support of a case study approach in that it was the best way to gain insight into the unique experiences of the participants. Ms.

Green also commented that the rationale given for selecting the targeted grade-level participants helped to enrich the quality of the data.

Discrepant Cases

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that some writers have suggested that researchers should seek data that might challenge their emerging findings. Data that challenge emerging findings are identified as discrepant cases. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), identifying data that might disconfirm the findings could help in supporting the validity of the study by presenting a full and unbiased account of the data. However, no discrepant cases were found. The data collected confirmed the findings of the study.

Summary of Findings

The research question that guided this study was as follows: What do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs? The findings showed that reading assessments, phonics instruction, use of visuals, small group instruction, and vocabulary instruction were the perceived best practices used by teachers to approach teaching English to ELLs. Of the five practices, the use of reading assessments was the perceived best practice used by 100% of the participants. The findings also showed that 67% of the participants felt that the most effective resource to use with ELLs was the reading ability leveled books from Reading A-Z, which was accessed online through the district-provided paid subscription. Additionally, even though only 33% of the participants reported using the Song of Sounds phonics kit, it was important to mention that the participants who used the

phonics kit rated it as being an effective resource in helping students acquire phonological skills.

Furthermore, the findings revealed gaps in teacher professional development trainings. The findings showed that about 80% of the participants received professional development trainings at least once a year, but the trainings they received were not always specific to ELL teaching and learning. Consequently, from among the participants who received professional development trainings at least once a year, only 40% reported that the trainings were good to halfway effective in instructing ELLs.

The purpose of this study was to investigate what do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs. The findings indicated that the participants used multiple resources and various practices but did not think the available resources or their current knowledge of skills were effective in helping all ELLs acquire English reading skills. The findings also revealed deficits in teacher professional development trainings, from the frequency of trainings offered to the type of content being delivered during the trainings, and the overall effectiveness of the trainings on student achievement in English reading. Another deficit area was consistency of resources. The findings indicated a need for consistency in the use of and access to effective resources. It was evident from the data that the deficit areas need to be addressed. A white paper was the project used to answer the research question and address the deficit areas.

Conclusion

A qualitative case study design was used for this research project. Purposeful sampling was used to select 15 participants who met the sampling criteria of being a teacher in the target school district for 2 or more years and teaching Grades 3-5 (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). The participant criteria aligned with the research question of finding out what do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants agreed to take part in the study voluntarily and were made aware of their right to discontinue their participation at any time.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the use of an interview protocol to ensure consistency in the data being collected (see Creswell & Poth, 2017). The interviews were conducted face-to-face and over the phone. As the interviews were being conducted, notes and reflections were documented about the data being collected for use during the analysis process (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data were analyzed using thematic analysis methods (Braun et al., 2019). Member checks, triangulation, and external auditing were used to ensure the validity of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). There were no discrepant cases. This was documented in the data analysis section.

The project that emerged from the findings was a white paper. In Section 3, I explain the project. The project includes recommendations for ongoing professional development for all teachers that focused on the use of effective ELL reading interventions as part of structured reading instruction. Additional recommendations are

included to address the need for consistent connections between theory and practice and time for teacher reflections and feedback.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

A white paper was the project I selected for this study (see Appendix A). In Section 3, I describe the rationale of why a white paper was chosen as the project outcome. Also included in this section is a review of the literature, details about the project description, details about the project evaluation plan, and details about the project implications.

Description and Goals

The project was a white paper that provided a summary of the research project and recommendations based on the data analysis. The white paper addressed the problem of low achievement in English reading among ELLs by summarizing the effective approaches that the participant teachers used with their ELLs. The white paper also addressed the gaps in instructional practice and recommendations to address those gaps that could benefit ELLs. One of the goals of the white paper is to inform the target school district about the local problem that prompted the study. Another goal of the white paper is to share the data and findings that were generated from the study. The final goal of the white paper is to offer recommendations to the target school district based on the findings from the study.

Rationale

The project that was derived from the research was a white paper. The purpose of a white paper is to advocate best practices for solving a specific problem (Purdue Online Writing Lab [OWL], 2019). A white paper provides distinct information to a specific

audience. Therefore, a white paper was chosen to propose recommendations to address the problem of low achievement in English reading among ELLs in the target school district.

After the data analysis in Section 2, I found that teachers were using various strategies and resources when working with ELLs, such as the use of visuals and vocabulary and small group instruction. However, these strategies and resources did not always lead to academic success for all ELLs. Even though the district provided English reading books and a phonics kit, there was no established reading structure that teachers followed. Further, I found that 60% of the teachers lacked relevant training for teaching reading to ELLs. Providing relevant training that focused on strategies for helping ELLs could give teachers the confidence and support they need to decrease the achievement gap among ELLs. Therefore, a white paper was chosen. It allowed the findings to be communicated in a comprehensible way to stakeholders and presented recommendations to address the problem of low reading achievement among ELLs (see Purdue OWL, 2019).

The project could be a solution to the problem of low ELL English reading achievement by informing the school district about the details of the problem through the data analysis and findings and then supplying the school district with research-based recommendations on how to solve the problem. The white paper could also bring greater awareness of the issue to the school district that could foster ongoing professional dialogue among all stakeholders on how to improve practices and policies continually for educating ELLs in a way that leads to their overall academic success.

Review of the Literature

From the data analysis in Section 2, I found that teachers were using various strategies to approach teaching English reading to ELLs. The practices used by the teachers were not part of a structured reading program, which accounted for variations in the approaches used by teachers and low student achievement levels. Also, over half of the teachers reported that their professional development needs in ELL teaching and learning were not being met. Furthermore, teachers felt that the number of times trainings were offered was not enough to impact student achievement effectively. Therefore, a white paper was chosen as the project to address the local problem, present the findings that emerged from the study, and make recommendations.

The search for current literature was completed by using the EBSCO Host database, which was accessed from Walden University, and by using Google Scholar. The terms that I used to conduct the search were as follows: *white paper, white paper: English language learners, white paper elementary education, teacher learning, teacher professional learning community, ELL teacher professional learning community,* and *balanced literacy.* The literature review entailed research on white papers and how they have been used in education, in addition to research-based recommendations derived from the study findings to address the local problem.

White Papers

Originally, the term *white paper*, also referred to as a background report, was used to denote government policy documents (Malone & Wright, 2018; Purdue OWL, 2019). White papers have also been defined as business documents created to present policy,

provide technical information, or identify a problem with proposed solutions (Purdue OWL, 2019). Presently, white papers are popular tools for disseminating information (Purdue OWL, 2019). According to Malone and Wright (2018), Purdue OWL (2019), and Novy (2016) the purpose of a white paper is to address a problem and offer possible solutions. Thus by offering possible solutions to a problem, white papers also elicit social action as readers of the report are called to act upon the information presented (Malone & Wright, 2018). Concurring, Novy indicated that readers of a white paper read it to gain knowledge about the problem so that they can make informed and data-driven decisions; as a result, white papers are a versatile writing genre. Numerous industries in business, political science, and education use white papers to provide readers with background information about an issue or provide information about studies that address problems with proposed solutions (Malone & Wright, 2018; Purdue OWL, 2019).

White papers have been used often in education to propose solutions to hot-topic issues in teaching and learning. In a white paper by Apfelbaum, Brown, and Zimmermann (2019), the problem they reported on was the lack of foundational reading skills among middle school students. Their proposed solution was a learning system called Foundations Learning System that targeted the development of phonics skills among learners to ensure the acquisition of higher reading abilities. Similarly, in a white paper by Reeder and Baxa (2017), the authors reported on the lack of oral language skills among primary school students and how those oral language deficiencies impacted student success in school. The solution to the problem addressed in their white paper was also a literacy program. Reeder and Baxa recommended the use of GrapeSEED, a

research-based oral language and listening program, to help primary students improve their oral language skills.

Further, other white papers highlighted the achievement gap among ELLs and recommended training as one of the possible solutions to the problem. In the white paper by Robinson-Zañartu, Rodríguez, and Olvera (2019), they reported information about school psychologists and the challenges they faced in providing proper assessments and supports to dual language learners. Robinson-Zañartu et al. concluded their white paper by recommending that school psychologists be provided with training to further their capacity to support the growing dual language learner population in schools. Likewise, in the white paper by Szekely and Wat (2016), they focused on the need for an effective assessment system targeted at early childhood through third grade students to determine if students were developing the critical skills needed at an early age to be successful throughout the rest of their school years. They also recommended targeted training, on a continual basis, for teachers and leaders. Continuing with the trend of recommending trainings, Menken (2017) wrote a white paper about the impact of leaders on the success of dual language bilingual education. In her white paper, Menken stressed the importance of bilingually knowledgeable leaders in sustaining and growing successful dual language programs.

White papers have also been used in education to advocate for the implementation or creation of policies that would benefit students and the wider school community. Menken (2017) recommended that school leaders establish an official school policy regarding language use in order to maintain the integrity of the dual language program.

Additionally, Myles, Tellier, and Holmes (2019) described the challenges and successes experienced by primary schools in England that implemented a language learning policy. Similar to the training recommendations made by Szekely and Wat (2016), Myles et al. likewise recommended training for primary teachers to strengthen their knowledge about language content knowledge and language instruction. In addition to training for teachers, Myles et al. recommended the creation of a collaborative school committee focused on the improvement of language instruction.

In comparing the above-mentioned white papers, I found that many of the recommendations proposed by the authors were similar to the recommendations made in my white paper. This comparison highlighted the validity of the recommendations made in my white paper as acceptable research-based recommendations. The rest of the literature review includes research on the primary recommendations included in the white paper that were made based on the findings from my study.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional development frequency was one of the themes discovered during data collection. The teacher participants reported inconsistencies in the teacher trainings they received. One way to have effective and consistent professional growth among teachers is to create professional learning communities (PLCs; Kennedy, 2016). PLCs have been recognized as highly effective methods of professional learning that continuously allow teachers to update their teaching practices (Qiao, Yu, & Zhang, 2018). According to Cheng and Wu (2016), PLCs are comprised of teachers who collaborate in the creation of knowledge with the main goal of developing effective

teachers. Similarly, Akiba and Liang (2016) defined PLCs as a collaboration among teachers to improve teaching and learning. In contrast, DuFour and Reeves (2016) distinguished between true PLCs and what they described as PLC Lite. True PLCs have five main components (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). The first component is collaboration. PLCs should include educators working together in teams towards a common group goal of student achievement (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Kruse & Johnson, 2017). The second component is that PLCs should work to establish a curriculum that defines the skills, knowledge, and attitudes students are supposed to gain from each unit of inquiry (Brown, Horn, & King, 2018; DuFour & Reeves, 2016). The third component involves educators working together to develop common assessments based on the curriculum, which leads to the fourth component (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). The fourth component makes use of the results of the common assessment to diagnose students who need extra learning support and would benefit from extended learning, to identify student strengths and challenges, and to indicate areas where educators were not able to increase student achievement (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). The fifth and final component involves PLCs that create a system to support learner needs without removing students from their classroom environment (Brown et al., 2018; DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Owen (2016) described something similar referring to PLCs as being mature when they operate under the concept of transforming teaching, from being taught by individual teachers who work in private to teachers who share ideas, open their classrooms for constructive observations, and collaborate and support each other. In contrast, if a school or group of educators were not asking and discussing four main questions during their PLC, they

were not a true PLC or a mature PLC but rather a PLC Lite (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Owen, 2016). The four main questions were as follows: What do we want students to learn? How will we know if they have learned it? What will we do if they have not learned it? How will we provide extended learning opportunities for students who have mastered the content? (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

The literature on PLCs also mentioned multiple benefits from the use of PLCs. In her study of elementary science teachers during a year-long lesson study PLC, Gutierez (2016) reported that the collaborative work done in PLCs helped to change teacher beliefs and practices. The PLC collaboration resulted in teachers enhancing their teaching strategies to increase student engagement (Gutierez, 2016). Echoing similar results, teachers in the study by Penner-Williams, Díaz, and Worthen (2017) also found that the collaborative work they did in their PLCs helped them to transfer their new learning into their classrooms where they saw student improvement. Hairon and Tan (2017) reported that PLCs provided the necessary environment for ongoing teacher learning when teachers met to share ideas or come up with solutions to school challenges. Benefits of the use of PLCs were also described in a study by Zhang, Liu, and Wang (2017), who investigated an online PLC. The online PLCs provided educators with more flexibility and ease on how and when to contact their peers to discuss a range of school topics. Conducting the PLC online also made the process of sharing teaching strategies and resources more efficient. Zhang et al. concluded that teachers mostly used the online PLC for reflective support and sharing documents. Also, as a result of the online PLC,

professional dialogue about teaching and learning practices increased (Zhang et al., 2017).

PLCs can be structured as a specific group, content or grade level, of teachers within a school or as a school-wide initiative led or directed by the school principal (Hairon, Goh, Chua, & Wang, 2017; Penner-Williams et al., 2017). When a PLC is made up of a small group of teachers, the learning can be targeted specifically to the needs of a certain group rather than generalized to a larger student population, which leads to a greater chance of student success (Thoma, Hutchison, Johnson, Johnson, & Stromer, 2017). In Singapore, the Ministry of Education views each school as a PLC and the grade level or subject teams are viewed as professional learning teams (PLTs) (Hairon & Tan, 2017). The PLTs meet to share common challenges and come up with solutions. These activities help to build a strong sense of team identity which, in turn, supports teacher learning (Hairon & Tan, 2017). Similarly, in a study of a grade-level PLC, Steeg (2016) was found that a small group PLC structure provided a low-risk environment in which teachers felt comfortable sharing their challenges. Investigating multiple school-wide PLCs, Steeg revealed that on a whole school level, the PLC was not highly effective in fostering change in lesson delivery. This was due to the format of the PLC, where teachers discussed their lesson delivery but did not elevate their discussions by examining how they could differ their lesson delivery to see improved student results. This implied that with thoughtful planning and a clear focus on action-oriented tasks, whole school PLCs could prove to be similarly effective as small group PLCs.

Support from key school stakeholders is vital in sustaining effective PLCs. In a study by Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017a), school principals selected one team of high-functioning teachers and one team of less well-functioning teachers to observe and interview during their PLC meetings. It was found that the high-functioning PLC team understood the vision for the PLC, which was analyzing data to track and monitor student progress, consistent meetings that focused on student achievement, and best practices for instruction. Similarly, the teachers in a study by Penner-Williams et al. (2017) credited their PLC experience as the reason they were able to implement new strategies and modify existing ones to meet the needs of students. They felt that their PLC was a safe place to try something new, knowing that they would be supported when things did not go as planned and afforded with more opportunities for growth when they needed more strategies for learner success. Echoing these results, the principals in the studies by Park, Lee, and Cooc (2019) as well as Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017b) were reported to have both played integral parts in the success of the PLCs at their campuses by supporting teachers in their focus on instructional improvement and team collaboration. Overall, PLCs rely on the whole community supporting each other and working together to make it a success for those taking part in them and the students they serve.

Balanced Literacy

The study data revealed a lack of structure in how teachers taught English reading to ELLs. Using a balanced literacy approach provides growth opportunities to students in the content area of reading. A review of the literature on balanced literacy revealed many definitions and understandings about balanced literacy (Lombardi & Behrman, 2016;

Steeg, 2016). According to Lombardi and Behrman (2016), balanced literacy is a compromise between reading theories that stress word recognition and constructivist approaches. Steeg (2016) defined balanced literacy as an approach that focuses on literature-rich text that helps students make meaning out of the literature, while Robinson, Lambert, Towner, and Caros (2016) defined balanced literacy as an approach to reading instruction that uses a variety of ways to engage students with literature. Despite the various definitions, Lombardi and Behrman (2016), Steeg (2016), and Tompkins (2018) all agreed that a balanced literacy approach utilizes a mixture of reading and writing strategies, guided reading and small group instruction, writing activities, and independent practice by students.

Current literature on balanced literacy has shown that it has been used successfully in schools. School districts have recommended the use of a balanced literacy approach for their teachers to use with students for literacy instruction (Hoff, 2017). Balanced literacy instructional materials could easily be accessed from educational publishers or constructed by teachers to specifically target the needs of learners at their schools (Robinson et al., 2016). In their study, Graham et al. (2018) analyzed 38 studies that tested the impact of balanced reading and writing programs on reading performance. They found that balanced reading and writing programs based on cooperative learning enhanced overall reading performance. Cooperative learning programs included explicit reading and writing instruction that was embedded in the lesson content. They also found that the balanced and remedial reading and writing programs for students who needed literacy interventions also yielded positive results in students' overall reading

performance. This was similar to the findings of Lombardi and Behrman (2016), who evaluated the READ 180 balanced literacy supplementary instruction program and concluded the growth of the underperforming high school ELLs to their participation in the program. One of the main components that Lombardi and Behrman attributed to student success was whole group instruction that taught or reviewed literacy skills and strategies. Learning stations was also a main part of the literacy lessons. A computer-based station was used to allow students to practice comprehension, vocabulary, and spelling. A small group station led by the teacher involved shared reading and writing. The last station was an independent reading station where students selected books on their reading level, which was a balanced literacy practice that Robinson et al. (2016) supported as a way to teach reading skills within the context of the literature. All of these components attributed to the ELLs in the balanced literacy intervention group, as in Lombardi and Behrman's (2016) study, had the highest gains in reading compared to the other groups.

Another benefit of a balanced literacy program on student success is the time devoted to literacy skills. The READ 180 program, investigated by Lombardi and Behrman (2016), was structured for students to receive 90 minutes of daily instruction following the READ 180 program. The students in the study by Robinson et al. (2016) received 120 minutes of daily reading instruction. Both studies reported positive student results, implying that the time spent on balanced reading activities contributed to student success.

Implementation

The project was a white paper. After final approval of the study from Walden University, the white paper will be presented to the target school district in Abu Dhabi. The curriculum department of the target school district will be contacted to set a meeting date to present the white paper. Before the presentation, the curriculum department will receive the white paper so it has enough time to review the report before the presentation. The presentation will consist of stating the problem, reviewing the data collection and analysis, and presenting recommendations.

Resources and Existing Supports

The researcher used many resources to complete the white paper. The Walden University Library was the main resource for researching articles for the literature reviews and information on white papers. The literature reviews also served as resources for providing research-based information about the local problem and insights into how to address the local problem. Another resource were the participants. They voluntarily supplied their perceptions about the local problem through semi-structured one-on-one interviews—the data collected. Lastly, the data collected and analyzed were key resources used to determine the three themes that emerged from the findings. The three themes were used in the white paper to arrive at the recommendations for the local problem.

There were also just as many supports as resources. My Walden University committee members for this project study were instrumental in providing timely feedback about the study. They were also available to answer questions and offer guidance, and

were very supportive throughout my doctoral study process. The target school district's central office research department was very supportive in granting me permission to conduct my study in the district. Additionally, meeting with the principals of the target schools was a support. The meeting allowed me to gain the names of the English teachers at each school in order to invite them to participate in my study. Moreover, the participants were also a support in that they agreed to volunteer their time to take part in the study and participated the whole way through. Lastly, the support of Ms. Green as my external auditor helped to substantiate the accuracy and validity of the data and findings which were used in my white paper.

Potential Barriers

The first potential barrier for the white paper is if the curriculum department of the target school district does not agree to meet with me. This would be a potential barrier because I would not be able to present my data, findings, and recommendations. Being able to present to the curriculum department would allow them to ask questions as well as give everyone a chance to engage in professional dialogue about my study that could potentially benefit ELLs in the target school district. Further, if the curriculum department does agree to meet with me, but does not read my white paper or implement the recommendations, those would also be potential barriers as the recommendations were derived from the findings of my study and current research as solutions to address the local problem.

Within the recommendations, potential barriers exist. First, one of the recommendations concerned providing appropriate resources for students that included

the use of technology. The potential barrier would be if the district did not have enough money in the budget to purchase appropriate resources for ELLs. Conversely, if the district did have money to purchase appropriate resources, the potential barrier would then be teachers not knowing how to use the resources and, therefore, not using the resources with their students. Similarly, another recommendation called for ongoing professional development training for teachers. The potential barrier here would be if the school district did not have money to spend on quality ongoing professional development for teachers. Another potential barrier is related to teacher buy-in. One of the recommendations was for schools to establish PLCs. A potential barrier would be teachers refusing to participate in PLCs or providing participation that was not meaningful. Finally, another potential barrier connected to PLCs is if teachers did not keep reflection journals or write reflections that could be shared during PLCs. This could lead to the PLCs not being as effective in supporting student achievement because teachers were not working on ways to improve their lesson delivery.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

After my doctoral study has been approved by Walden University, I will contact the head of the curriculum department of the target school district to schedule a meeting to present my white paper. Once the meeting has been confirmed, I will email a copy of my white paper to the head of the curriculum department so he or she can view my report before the meeting. After the meeting, I would propose that the reflection journals and ongoing professional development be implemented before the current school year ends, and resources, the balanced literary program, and PLCs be implemented at the start of the

2021-2022 school year. The reflection journals should be implemented before the start of the new school year so that teachers have time to practice and become accustomed to the habit of writing reflections ahead of the start of the PLCs when they will be used. Similarly, ongoing professional development should start before the new school year starts, but on a small scale and with increased offerings based on district and school need and teacher feedback. Then key district personnel would have time to plan the balanced literacy program and purchase the appropriate resources before the start of the new school year. The training time before the start of the school year could be used to train teachers on the balanced literacy program and how to use the resources. This time could also be used for schools to implement their PLCs.

Roles and Responsibilities of Researcher and Others

My role as the researcher was to create the white paper with recommendations based on my findings and current research. My role and responsibility were also to present my white paper to the target school district. No one else had any responsibility in the creation or presentation of my white paper. Within the target school district, it would be the role of the head of the curriculum department to accept or decline a meeting with me to present my white paper.

In implementing the recommendations, it would be the responsibility of the curriculum team to work with primary school principals and other key personnel in the district to implement the recommendations. The curriculum department would need to communicate to primary school principals the expectations for the reflection journal and how it connects with the upcoming PLCs so that the journal could be implemented first,

along with professional development. One of the first professional development sessions could be on the effective use of reflection journals. Furthermore, after the curriculum department has met with primary school principals to go over the expectations for the reflection journal and PLCs, it would then be the responsibility of the primary school principals to hold teachers accountable for engaging fully with both recommendations.

The curriculum department would also be responsible for communicating district professional development goals to primary school principals so that they could assess their school-wide professional development needs in order to budget funds for professional development training for staff. It would also be the responsibility of the curriculum team to create the balanced literacy program or choose an already established balanced literacy program and purchase the resources that would accompany the balanced literacy program. The curriculum department would also be responsible for planning the trainings that teachers would need to implement the balanced literacy program along with follow-up and refresher sessions throughout the school year. It would then remain the responsibility of the curriculum department to build and maintain an ongoing professional development program and hold schools accountable for following the balanced literacy program and the effective use of resources.

Project Evaluation

The project evaluation will be summative and goal-based. The evaluation plan will include three teacher and principal surveys throughout the 2021-2022 school year and a test results meeting at the end of the school year. The first two surveys will gather initial data about teacher and principal perceptions of the implementation and usefulness

of the recommendations. The third survey will be used to find out the overall effectiveness of the recommendations on instructional delivery and student learning, and serve as useful data for the district on how to make adjustments, if any, to the recommendations. Then, at the end of the 2021-2022 school year, I will meet with the head of the curriculum department to find out the results of the 2021-2022 district English reading test scores.

The goal of the project was to share the results of my research with the head of the curriculum department of the target school district so that the recommendations could be used with students and teachers in the target school district to improve reading test scores. The overall evaluation goal is that it be evident whether the recommendations were useful and effective for students and teachers. The final survey results should indicate that more than half of the teachers and principals found the recommendations to be contributing factors to student and teacher success during the 2021-2022 school year. The English test scores should be at or above the target scores set by the district and above the test results from the 2016-2017 school year.

The key stakeholders are the teachers, principals, and curriculum department. The primary school teachers would be the ones implementing the recommendations, with the goal of increasing their skills and knowledge to help their ELLs increase in their reading abilities, as evidenced by the improved English test results. The principals would take the lead on the recommendations at the campus level. They would make sure that teachers received the necessary trainings and hold teachers accountable for properly implementing the recommendations. The curriculum team, after initial implementation, would continue

to act as a support to schools to ensure they had the required resources and training to carry out the recommendations effectively.

Implications Including Social Change

The possible social change implications of the white paper include bringing an awareness of the problem of the low English reading achievement levels of the ELLs in the target school district. It is important for this problem to be addressed so that curriculum, training, and other resources can be tailored to meet the diverse needs of ELLs. This would then help to ensure the success of ELLs in English reading as well as other core academic subjects. In addition, it would also give ELLs the opportunity to compete globally with their peers around the world (Cogo & Yanaprasart, 2018).

Local Community

The data from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 English reading test data showed a continuous decline in student achievement. The white paper project addresses the needs of the ELLs in the target school district by first distinguishing the effective approaches used by teachers with their ELLs, and then identifying areas where teachers perceived there were gaps in practice. Then, by using the findings from the data collection process, recommendations were made for improvement. The report recommends the implementation of a balanced literacy program for all primary schools. A balanced literacy program would ensure that the curriculum was tailored to meet the needs of ELLs and that teachers had the appropriate resources to teach ELLs specifically. The report also recommends that teachers keep reflection journals and schools form PLCs. The reflection journals and PLCs would benefit ELLs because teachers would be constantly reflecting

on their practices. Then, they would share their reflections during PLC meetings as a way to collaborate and exchange ideas for improvement with instructional delivery. Lastly, the report recommends continuous professional development for teachers. Continuous professional development would ensure that teachers were updated on the latest strategies, programs, and technology to better teach ELLs.

The white paper will be important to students, families, instructors, administrators, and community partners. Primarily under the recommendation for a balanced literacy program, ELLs will benefit from getting instruction that is the best fit for their learning needs. Families will have the support of the district in helping their ELLs while also gaining the peace of mind that their children are receiving an education that is appropriate to their needs. Families will also have the benefit of their children being able to compete with other English speakers around the world, which could lead to many global opportunities. Instructors will benefit from the white paper as their voices will be heard for their perceptions on the best way to approach teaching ELLs as well as their concerns about what is lacking and needs to be improved in how ELLs are educated. Further, administrators will benefit by being able to lead schools that have high student achievement results because of the PLC collaboration of all staff members working together to improve their skills to help all students succeed. Lastly, the white paper will be important to community partners because the recommendations are focused on increased student achievement for ELLs. Community partners will benefit from knowing that schools are cultivating and equipping learners with 21st century skills to be highly skilled and productive citizens.

Far-reaching Impact

In the larger context, the white paper will be important to other schools or school districts with high populations of ELLs. From the white paper, other schools or school districts will have access to my research and the recommendations that were derived from the findings of my study to decide if the white paper recommendations could be viable solutions to the issues they face with their ELLs. The white paper will also be far-reaching in that it will add to the current body of literature on ELL reading achievement.

Conclusion

Section 3 included a description of the project which was a white paper. A white paper was chosen as the project because it provides distinct information on how to solve a problem. One of the main goals of the white paper was to provide the target school district with recommendations that addressed the issue of low achievement in English reading among ELLs. Other recommendations were also provided that addressed gaps in instructional practice. Also in Section 3, a second literature review was conducted that focused on consistent professional development training for teachers and a balanced literacy program. Literature on PLCs as sources of ongoing professional development was also included in the literature review.

Additionally, Section 3 included the project implementation plan, which involved a meeting with the head of the curriculum department of the target school to present the white paper. I also detailed the proposal for implementing the project and the timeline for when the recommendations should be implemented. Two recommendations were

proposed to start before the new school year started. The other two recommendations were proposed to be implemented at the start of the new school year.

Furthermore, the white paper could not have been completed without resources and supports. The Walden University Library, research study participants, and the research data that were collected all served as sources for the white paper project. Walden University committee members, the target school district's research department, the target school district primary school principals, the research participants, and the external auditor all served as supports.

Some potential barriers were also identified. Not being able to meet with the head of the curriculum department was a major potential barrier since the meeting would be the venue for presenting my white paper and explaining my recommendations. The other potential barriers dealt with the district lacking money to spend on appropriate resources and ongoing professional development training as well as lacking teacher participation during PLCs especially in keeping reflection journals.

Section 3 also included details of how the project will be evaluated by surveying teachers and principals three times during the school year about the usefulness and effectiveness of the recommendations. The English reading test results will also be used as an evaluation tool by comparing the test results from the 2021-2022 school year with the test results from the 2016-2017 school year to identify the changes in the results. The goal is that the results from the 2021-2022 school year will show positive growth, thus indicating that the English reading achievement gap was getting smaller.

Finally, Section 3 concluded with project implications for the local community and far-reaching implications. The many groups that comprise the local community would all benefit from the white paper because the recommendations in the white paper support instructional improvements that could lead to student achievement. The white paper would also be beneficial to other schools with large populations of ELLs as a source of ideas on how to solve similar issues. In addition, the white paper could be a benefit by adding to the current body of literature on ELL education. Next, in Section 4 of this study, I detail my reflections and conclusions.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Low reading achievement among primary school ELLs in the target school district was the problem addressed in my research study. Recommendations included in my white paper were made to address the problem based on the data analysis and findings. Section 4 contains my reflections and conclusions about the project. These reflections and conclusions address project strengths and limitations, recommendations for alternative approaches, impacts on positive social change, and recommendations for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

Multiple strengths are associated with this project. The white paper that addressed the low achievement gap among primary school ELLs in the target school district is one of the strengths. The white paper addressed the problem, research, data collection and findings, and recommendations to be shared with the target school district in a summarized way that is easy to read and understand. Another strength of the project comes from the recommendations. Four recommendations that addressed the local problem and research findings were made in the white paper. All four recommendations were research-based and familiar best practices, making them practical to implement in schools. Having four recommendations also provides the target school district with the option of implementing some of the recommendations if they were not able to implement all of them, thereby still being able to address the local problem of low reading

achievement among primary school ELLs with at least one recommendation. From the data collected during the study, it was clear that teachers wanted consistent training that focused on ELL teaching and learning. One of the white paper recommendations was to schedule ongoing training for teachers that focused on instructional practices to benefit ELLs. This recommendation would most likely be supported by the teachers in the target school district because, according to the research study data collected from the participants, many teachers seemed to want it but were not receiving it. Another white paper recommendation called for a balanced literacy program with ELL-appropriate resources. This recommendation came from the data collected from the participants about having access to ELL appropriate resources. This recommendation is a strength because teachers would most likely welcome the use of ELL-appropriate resources to use with their ELLs to improve their English reading skills. Now that the project strengths have been highlighted, the project limitations are also addressed.

Limitations

Just as the white paper has many strengths, it also has limitations. The first limitation is whether the head of the curriculum department for the target school district does not meet with me, or if the head of the curriculum department and other key district central office personnel do not read the white paper. This is a limitation because the work that went into addressing the problem would not be known and put to use in order to solve the problem of low reading achievement among primary school ELLs in the district. Another limitation is that the study focused on a limited number of Grade 3 through Grade 5 primary school teachers in one school district. The specific focus on one

group of students and teachers in a single school district could limit its use in other school settings. Further, finances could be a limitation. The school district will need to budget money for ongoing professional development for teachers and for ELL-appropriate resources. If money is not allocated for these white paper recommendations, then what could be achieved by students and teachers in response to solving the local problem would be limited. The final limitation is teachers' support of the reflection journal and their effective use of it in conjunction with active participation in PLCs.

Remediation of Limitations

Even though there are limitations to the project study, these limitations can be remedied. To address the first limitation mentioned above regarding the meeting with the head of the curriculum department and ensuring that district central office personnel read the white paper, I will provide flexible meeting options so that I am able to meet with the head of the curriculum department. Also, the head of the curriculum department will have the option of a face-to-face meeting or an online meeting platform for me to present the white paper project. After a meeting date has been established, I will email a copy of the white paper to the head of the curriculum department and follow up within a week to make sure he or she has received it and to answer any immediate questions about the white paper. Next, to address the limited number of teachers, specific grade levels, and one school district, it will be necessary to conduct the research with middle and high school teachers in the target school district as well as with schools in other districts. It would probably be beneficial for the target school district to discover if the same problem exists at the upper school levels and how the upper school teachers approach the problem.

Then, the target school district would be able to compare those findings with the findings from my study as presented in the white paper. The next limitations related to school finances for ongoing professional development and ELL-appropriate resources. To remedy the limitation of finances for ELL-appropriate resources, the district could work with vendors who offer trial or bulk order discounts to make the resource purchase more affordable. Then, to remedy the limitation of finances for ongoing professional development for teachers, principals could work with the finance department to find out where funds could be allocated to increase their professional development budget to support ongoing professional development focused on ELL teaching and learning. To remedy the final project limitations, I would suggest to the head of the curriculum department that school principals first talk with their teachers about the benefits of keeping reflection journals and having PLCs. I would then provide teachers with as much information about reflection journals and PLCs so that shared goals could be created before the start of the new school year. In addition, principals should provide teachers with time to practice writing in their reflection journal and sharing their reflections with colleagues. All of these actions would set schools up to be successful in fully implementing these two white paper recommendations at the start of the new school year.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The white paper was the best choice for the project deliverable in addressing the local problem for this study. However, the problem could have be addressed from alternative approaches. I have identified three approaches that could have been used to address the problem and will explain why they were not the best choice.

The first alternative way to address the problem would have been to conduct a week-long professional development training during the summer. This approach was not the best because it would not have addressed the need for ongoing professional development. Also, the summer professional development training would have been limited by training venue capacity. All primary teachers would not have been able to attend due to space. If the week-long professional development training had been recorded to accommodate for limited training venue capacity, it would still not have been the best approach. Recording the professional development training to use as a training video with the teachers who did not attend the live training would not fully guarantee that they would get the same training experience as their colleagues who attended the live training.

The second alternative way to address the problem would have been to create a balanced literacy curriculum. This approach also would not have addressed the need for ongoing professional development and teacher collaboration. In creating a balanced literacy curriculum as the project, the curriculum could have been used by teachers as a sequential roadmap for how to teach lessons that lead to ELL growth and success. However, the balanced literacy curriculum would not have adequately addressed teacher collaboration in meeting the needs of ELLs.

The third alternative approach to addressing the problem would have been to implement a reading skills intervention program. On its own, it is unsure if all teachers would effectively use the intervention program throughout the entire school year. The intervention program would need to be accompanied by continuous professional

development, and teachers would need designated times to discuss the effectiveness of the intervention with their colleagues, as suggested in my project through the use of PLCs.

Scholarship

Scholarship is a process that requires dedication to studying and researching a specific topic or field of study ("Scholarship," n.d.). I learned that scholarship is a continuous process of taking in information and processing and applying it to the specific areas being worked on, whether to complete a literature review, data collection, or an analysis write-up. Scholarship, or knowledge, takes time to form. Each course that I took in which I interacted with the instructors and my peers and each research article that I read and processed added to my knowledge which I built upon as I continued my doctoral process. Also, scholarship is being able to accept guidance from experienced scholars who have paved the way and are able to share their wisdom and provide great insights with those who are willing to accept them. My professors and committee chairs all played a crucial part in guiding me in my understanding of scholarship. It was not always easy receiving their feedback and applying it to my work, but it was for the best in helping me to grow as a scholar.

Project Development

I learned that project development is a process that takes time, patience, and planning. The project was a white paper that summarized my research study, identified key themes, and provided suggestions to address the local problem from my study. I learned that when going through the process of project development, one must wait until

after the research has been conducted and the data analyzed to develop the project. This is done so that one can use the findings to achieve a suitable project rather than choose a project format based on familiarity or ease of use. After I selected my project format of a white paper, I came up with a plan of how I would proceed with developing my project, which was to first do some research on white papers in order to find out how to write one that would allow my research, findings, and suggestions to be presented concisely and coherently. I used Purdue Online Writing Lab to conduct my research on white papers to find out more information about white papers and how to write one. I also used the Walden University Library to find and read different white papers to give me ideas on how I would write my white paper. Then, I reread my research study to decide which information would be included. In deciding on which information to include in my white paper, the biggest challenge was making sure I provided enough information without making the white paper too long—potentially losing my audience. To address this challenge, I reread sections that I thought were too long. Then, I highlighted the main ideas and key points that addressed the local problem. Next, I removed all unnecessary information. If the main idea and key points were still coherent after the changes, then that section was done. If after the changes the section did not flow properly or was not clear, I added details that focused on supporting the main idea or key points from that section. After my white paper was completed, I read it again in its entirety for clarity and made notes on how I would present it to the local school district. This practice helped me to anticipate any questions they might ask in order to prepare my responses ahead of time.

Leadership and Change

I learned that leadership involves being an agent of change. Leadership and change go hand in hand. To be an agent of change, a leader should be willing to take initiatives to ignite and enact change within an organization. Leadership also requires a sense of bravery. The initiatives and changes set forth by leaders will not always receive positive support, so when in leadership, a leader must be brave enough to implement changes and back these changes up with research in order to gain support or maintain credibility with staff. Further, education is constantly evolving and leaders should stay up to date with current trends and changes as well as be knowledgeable enough to determine what changes are the best fit for their organization. This will ensure that all members of the organization is current and knowledgeable about their roles and functions and are able to execute them in a way that promotes success and growth for all.

As a result of my doctoral coursework, I have changed and become a stronger leader. I now know how to better conduct research through the use of scholarly literature to make and support my decisions. I have also grown in my confidence to lead others. The knowledge that I have gained—from the extensive literature I have read to the thoughtful discussions with other doctoral candidates and my professors—has been invaluable in helping me to share best practices with my colleagues and guide them on how to accomplish success with learners. Also, the step-by-step process that was done in completing my research study has assisted me with solving problems at work. I am now able to use a similar approach to identifying problems at work by researching the problems through various means to see if others have also encountered the problems, and

then collecting and analyzing the data to reach possible solutions to the problems. At that point, the solutions are then presented to my leadership team to establish a plan for implementation. The changes that have occurred in my leadership skills as a result of my doctoral coursework, research study, and project have left a lasting impression on who I will continue to be as an effective agent of change.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

All the actions that went into completing my doctoral research study have enhanced my skills as a scholar. I enjoyed the research process the most because I like looking for answers. With each article I read, I gained more knowledge about ELLs and how they learned best in order to address the local problem of low achievement in reading. Conducting research was also enjoyable because through the literature, I was able to connect with other scholars and engage in meaningful discourse about the topic of ELL education in hopes of gaining more insight into the topic that would be effective in solving the local problem. Also during the research process, I found that I improved my stamina for working with vast amounts of information, searching for answers to the local problem, and focusing on and keeping an interest in the work. I also increased in my determination for not giving up when the information I was looking for was not evident in the first few sources that I read.

As a scholar, I am now meticulous and focused when I look for and read over research articles. I check to make sure the articles are peer-reviewed or from credible sources, so I know that the research has been approved by experts in the field. I also use the references from peer-reviewed articles to research the sources that were referenced in

order to gain more knowledge or different perspectives about a topic. Additionally, I learned that I do not research so that I can add to my current knowledge; rather, I research so that I can share the knowledge I have learned with others. The hope is that I inspire those with whom I am sharing so they may try a new approach in a different way, conduct further research on their own, or share the information with others beyond my reach.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

I learned that it is not enough to acquire knowledge. Knowledge must also be put into practice if it is to be beneficial and make a positive impact. As a practitioner, I have taken what I learned during my doctoral study and applied it to the tasks specific to my job function as a school leader. For example, I have used the knowledge gained from current literature that was researched during my doctoral study to provide feedback to teachers to help improve student learning. Additionally, when I conducted professional development sessions for staff on my campus, I used the ideas and strategies that I learned from my research study to guide the trainings. Being able to transfer my knowledge into practice really helped to build my confidence as an instructional leader, and improved my ability to be an expert in the field of ELL.

Furthermore, as a practitioner, the way I handled daily work tasks and projects changed. I learned to be more aware of my work performance by evaluating my practices to discover ways that could improve them. Also, my communication skills, both oral and written, have improved. Throughout my doctoral study, it was very important to communicate what was learned with my doctoral candidate peers, my professors, and my

committee chair, both orally and through my writing. This process has been invaluable to my productivity at work. I have used my improved oral and written communication skills to communicate more effectively with my colleagues. Overall, I will continue to put into action what I have learned during my doctoral study in order to make a positive impact in my workplace.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

The concept of starting and completing a project was not new to me. I have completed numerous projects for work and home. However, having to develop and implement a doctoral study project differs greatly from completing a project for work or home. I had to practice patience and wait to complete my research study before I could develop the project. Developing the project for my doctoral study required the use of the data collected from my research study to dictate what the project would be. In selecting which type of project to develop, I learned that I needed to choose a project deliverable that was best suited to the data I collected and the findings I discovered. The project had to address the problem of low student achievement in reading and present the themes that were revealed during the data collection.

The project I selected was a white paper. In developing my white paper, I knew my task was to create a project deliverable that would address the local problem and present the themes and recommendations. In doing so, my white paper had to be clear and concise for stakeholders to understand the local problem and the recommendations in order to make informed decisions about solving the local problem. I learned that it takes time for me to develop a project because I want to make sure my recommendations lead

to positive change and are actions that schools could easily implement. This process took time as I researched literature that supported my recommendations for helping ELLs in the target school district improve their English reading skills. Learning how to develop a project has been a great experience because I am now equipped with the knowledge and skills to solve problems in a systematic way that has the potential for leading to increased student achievement.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The problem identified in the local school district was low reading achievement in English reading among ELLs. As a result, the research study was conducted to address the local problem. Finally, the project was developed to present the local problem, findings, and recommendations to key stakeholders in the target school district so that they might solve the local problem. This research work is important because the findings and recommendations could be used by the target school district to impact ELL teaching and learning positively in a way that produces increased reading achievement among ELLs.

The research study is also important because it adds to the current body of knowledge on ELL education. The research work could be used to assist other scholars in researching solutions to closing ELL reading achievement gaps. The research work could also be used by other school districts to assist them in closing their achievement gaps among ELLs as well as providing ideas on research-based instructional practices for ELLs. In addition to adding to the current body of knowledge, I learned that this study has implications for keeping the topic of ELL education current and relevant among

educators and other stakeholders. The work on this study could support educators in investing their time, knowledge, resources, and efforts to make sure all ELLs are successful in school, which could confidently impact the lives of ELLs after they leave school.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Potential Impact for Positive Social Change

The white paper project that was developed from the research study has the potential to impact social change positively on the classroom, school district, and local policy levels. These implications for social change do not exceed the study boundaries. On the classroom level and school district levels, this project has the potential to enhance teacher knowledge through the implementation of the recommendations made for ELL achievement in English reading. The recommendation for ongoing professional development sessions for teachers has the potential to ensure that teachers in the local school district stay current in their knowledge and practice of ELL instruction. Also, the recommendation for PLCs on each primary school campus in the district has the potential for teachers to further enhance their knowledge about ELL instruction in a smaller group setting while also working on improving their collaboration skills. Next, the recommendation for the use of a reflection journal has the potential for helping teachers to identify their gaps in instruction so that they can better meet the needs of their ELLs. Another project recommendation was to implement a balanced literacy program. This recommendation has the potential to ensure equity among teachers in teaching ELLs. As teachers engage in the above recommended actions, hopefully with their newfound or

refreshed knowledge and skills, they will be able to influence their ELLs in their learning that positively impacts student achievement. This, is turn, has the potential for creating a stronger school district with highly trained teachers who are vested in success for all ELLs.

The potential impact on policy is that this project could be used by the local school district to create an ELL policy that targets improvement in English reading. There is potential for the balanced literacy recommendation to be converted into a policy whereby all ELLs must receive a set amount of time of English reading instruction each week that is delivered in a structured way. The balanced literacy recommendation could also influence a policy by the local school district that creates time and space, outside of lessons, for ELLs to practice their English skills with teachers and/or peers.

Implications and Applications

The white paper project has implications for both teacher and ELL growth and success. The recommendations made in the white paper have implications for teacher-enhanced knowledge through active participation in ongoing professional development trainings and PLC meetings, as well as time to reflect on instructional and classroom practices through the use of the reflection journal. There is also the implication for strengthening teacher bonds through teamwork and collaboration while working in PLCs. In addition, there is also the implication for student growth through the enhanced ELL instruction they could receive from their teachers as a result of the teacher professional development trainings, PLC meetings, reflection journal input, and balanced literacy program.

The white paper project is applicable to the field of education in various ways. It can be used with teachers to reinforce the importance of staying current about instructional methods for ELLs and collaborating with peers. It can also be used by teachers to influence change in their classrooms on how they approach teaching reading to ELLs. Also, the four recommendations provided in the white paper project can be applied with discretion based on the needs of the school. For example, one of the recommendations in the white paper was to establish a PLC at each primary school in the target school district. If a school already had a PLC in place on its campus, then the school would not need to implement one. However, it would want to examine the effectiveness of its current PLCs to make sure the activities conducted during the PLC meetings were effective in meeting the needs of ELLs.

Directions for Future Research

This research study could be extended to the middle and high school levels. Data could be collected from middle and high school teachers in the local school district about the approaches they use to teach ELLs. This could be done to examine if the problem of low reading achievement among ELLs that was identified at the primary school level persisted as students continued to the next grade level or if the problem subsided over time. Additionally, the original research study only included third, fourth, and fifth grades. This research project could be conducted again in the local school district to include kindergarten, first, and second grades. This would help to compare approaches used by all levels of ELL teachers on the primary school level in order to identify patterns

and overlap in approaches used. The data could also be used to determine which approaches helped or hindered ELLs' reading ability from one grade level to the next.

Conclusion

This research study was guided by the question: What do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs? The data collected from the research study led to the development of the project, which was a white paper. The goal of the white paper was to summarize the research study and findings, and make recommendations to the local school district to address the local problem of low student achievement among primary school ELLs. The white paper was deemed the most suitable format for the project because it provided concise information about the local problem and literature related to the problem that could be used by the local school district. The white paper also detailed four recommendations that could be implemented by the local school district to address the local problem. The white paper project has implications for helping teachers utilize research-based practices for ELL instruction that could help close the achievement gap among ELLs in the local school district and potentially ELLs in other school districts as well.

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Appendix A: White Paper

Best Approaches for English Acquisition With Primary English Language Learners

White Paper

Presented by Roxanna Leonie Gario

Walden University

August 2020

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Best Approaches for English Acquisition With Primary English Language Learners

Introduction

The leaders of Abu Dhabi understood that one day the oil would run out and could not be the only means of livelihood for the country. The late Sheikh Zayed believed that all children should be prepared for a new and modern world (Baker, 2017). The leaders of Abu Dhabi realized that in order for their country to be a sustainable place for their citizens to live and work, they must equip their students with 21st century skills (Eranpalo, Jorgenson, & Woolsey, 2016). Possessing 21st century skills would enable their students to compete globally with other English-speaking countries and fulfill the country's vision of developing the global skills of its citizens (Cogo & Yanaprasart, 2018).

Then in 2010, the Abu Dhabi Education Council initiated an ambitious endeavor to implement a new school model, a school reform that established a biliterate curriculum across all government schools in Abu Dhabi (Eranpalo et al., 2016). The reform was part of the United Arab Emirate's (USE) vision to move away from a heavy reliance on oil as a means of revenue and equipping native citizens with the skills and knowledge needed to work locally rather than outsourcing jobs to nonnatives (Ryan, 2016). The reform changed how the curriculum was delivered. Initially, the curriculum was delivered only in Arabic. The reform set the expectation that students be able to read, communicate, and comprehend in both English and Arabic (Baker, 2017; Eranpalo et al., 2016).

One of the school council's goals was to be a world leader in education. In order to meet this goal, students would have to gain proficiency in English by the time they

completed their senior year of high school. This meant students needed to be able to speak, read, and write in English at levels of 80% and above, as measured by the External Measurement of Student Achievement (EMSA) school assessment. The EMSA was a yearly standardized test administered in the spring. The results were used by school leaders to monitor student progress and plan school needs for the upcoming school year.

Local Problem

During the 2015-2016 school year, there was a 26% gap of third through fifth grade students who barely or did not pass the standardized English reading test. Subsequently, the following school year, only 71% of the third, fourth, and fifth grade students scored A or B, leaving an increased gap, from the previous year, of 29% of students who barely passed or did not pass the end-of-year English reading test. The pattern of achievement, evident by the test results, showed that the gap in English reading needed to be addressed. If left unaddressed, then the pattern of decline would most likely continue.

Also, evidence of the problem was observed during peer teacher observations. Teachers discovered that their peers were not following a structured guided reading program with their English Language Learners (ELLs). Teachers also had concerns about the lack of access to resources that were suitable for their ELLs. Both teachers and school administrators agreed that low student achievement in English reading, measured by the end-of-year English reading assessment, was a problem. This problem needed to be addressed in order for students to achieve higher results on the standardized test as well as continued growth and proficiency in English.

Summary of Doctoral Study

Guiding Research Question

Based on the data from the English reading exam for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years that showed low achievement in English reading, I investigated the instructional practices of English medium teachers (EMTs). The guiding question of my qualitative study was: What do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs?

Methodology

The conceptual framework for my study was Krashen's monitor model, a second language acquisition theory that consisted of five hypotheses: acquisition learning hypothesis, natural order hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, input hypothesis, and affective filter hypothesis (Mani, 2016). Krashen's monitor model was chosen because it explained some of the ways in which students developed language skills (Mani, 2016). Krashen's monitor model consisted of five hypotheses, but I only focused on the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. The input hypothesis explained that learners acquired language by comprehending input that is a little above their current level of understanding (Krashen, 2017a; Mani, 2016; Xu, 2016). I also chose to include the input hypothesis in my conceptual framework because other researchers have used it to describe how second language learners obtain a new language (Bossé et al., 2018; Chinkina & Meurers, 2016; Huang, 2019). The affective filter hypothesis was used together with the input hypothesis. The affective filter hypothesis described the link between student attitudes and success in learning a second language (Xu, 2016). If a

low-anxiety environment is established in classrooms, then students would feel comfortable taking risks that may enable them to acquire new information.

A qualitative case study design was used to investigate the research-based strategies EMTs used with their ELLs. Purposeful sampling was used to select 15 third through fifth grade EMTs from primary schools in the district. These grade-level teachers were considered the most appropriate for the study because these grade levels took the district standardized English test. Teachers who were new to the country were not invited to participate because they would not have had enough experience teaching ELLs in the target school district to provide substantial information about the approaches they used or to reflect on their instructional impact with their ELL students. I did not work with or have any supervisory role with the participants. The participants were informed that their responses would be kept confidential, their identities would be anonymous, and their participation was voluntary (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Data were initially collected through expert panel interviews to test the clarity and appropriateness of the interview questions before using them with participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The feedback from the expert panel indicated that the interview questions were clear and appropriate, so no changes were made to the interview questions. The study participants all took part in one semi-structured one-on-one interview that lasted between 45-60 minutes. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recoded to capture their responses accurately. Notes were also taken during the interviews and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis and Results

After data collection, I used thematic analysis to analyze the data. Thematic analysis can be used in conjunction with many theoretical frameworks and can provide a rich description of the phenomenon (Braun et al., 2019). Three themes emerged from the data that covered perceived best practices used by teachers, professional development, and instructional resources. Each theme was addressed in answering the research question.

Theme 1: Perceived best practices used by teachers to teach ELLs. The data revealed that teachers used 31 different practices to teach ELLs. The practices that were discussed the most among the participants as being effective were: use of visuals, vocabulary instruction, small group instruction, phonics instruction, and reading assessments. All of the participants reported the use of reading assessments, whereas vocabulary instruction was the least used practice of the five perceived best practices.

Theme 2: Professional development. The frequency of professional development training was not consistent among the primary schools. The participants reported that they received professional development training weekly, termly, annually, almost never, or not at all. The majority of the participants (9) reported that they received training on a termly basis. Five of the participants specifically reported that they did not receive training on how to teach ELLs, while two participants reported that they never received any type of professional development training from their current district.

The participants received various types of trainings. The most common trainings reported were phonics, reading instruction, ELL strategies, and use of the reading website

subscription purchased by the district. Even though eight participants referred to using the reading website, only two participants reported receiving training on how to use the website with their students.

The participants' perceptions of the level of effectiveness of their district-provided training varied. Only two participants reported that they thought the trainings were effective. The same number of participants felt the trainings were halfway effective and not focused on ELL instruction. In contrast, nine participants felt the trainings were not effective, and shared similar views with the two participants who felt the trainings were tailored to teaching native language English speakers rather than ELLs.

Theme 3: Instructional resources. In the discussion on professional development, resource use was a common topic among all participants. Many of the participants used similar resources. The most used resources were the Reading A-Z website, the Song of Sounds phonics program, and teacher-made resources. Reading A-Z was an online reading subscription purchased by the district for student and teacher use. Ten of the 15 participants used Reading A-Z with their students and found that it was a useful resource because students had access to books on their reading level. However, there were challenges with implementing and using Reading A-Z. Two participants were not able to use the website after the subscription expired. Another participant felt Reading A-Z was difficult to implement at school because of not having enough time within the school day to take the class to the computer lab, and felt that parental involvement was lacking for home usage. Finally, three of the participants reported that they monitored their students' usage at school and at home.

Song of Sounds, the phonics program purchased by the district for elementary school use, was used less often by participants than Reading A-Z. Only five participants reported using Song of Sounds with their ELLs. Even though Song of Sounds was not a resource used by the majority of the participants, it was reported as an effective resource for improving students' phonological ability.

When teachers did not have access to resources that would be beneficial to their ELLs, they created them. Five of the 15 participants reported that they made their own resources. The participants reported making hands-on, visual, and auditory types of resources.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were based on the research question: What do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs? The analysis of the data uncovered gaps in teacher professional development trainings. About 80% of the participants received professional development trainings at least once a year, but the trainings were not specifically geared towards ELL instruction.

Also, the analysis of the data revealed a need for consistency in the use of and access to effective resources for ELL students. The analysis of the data showed that reading assessments, phonics instruction, use of visuals, small group instruction, and vocabulary instruction were perceived as being the practices for instructing ELLs. The analysis of the data also showed that 67% of the participants felt that the most effective resource to use with ELLs were the leveled books from Reading A-Z. Additionally, the

participants who used the phonics kit thought it was an effective resource in helping students acquire phonics skills.

Professional Development

Based on the data, it is recommended that scheduled ongoing professional development sessions be provided for ELL teachers that focus on ELL literacy instruction (Avidov-Ungar, 2016). Professional development is a learning process taken on by educators that leads to improvements in teaching and learning (Avidov-Ungar, 2016; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). These professional development activities should be ongoing and focus on best instructional practices that support ELL instruction. They should be ongoing because many of the teachers reported they did not receive training consistently, and when they did receive training, it was not largely effective in helping them meet the needs of their ELLs. Also, continuous professional development is important for school success because it ensures that teachers are prepared to do their jobs every year, not only at the beginning of their teaching career, and it contributes to school-wide success (Elliott, 2018). The professional development sessions should be planned by the district's curriculum team based on data about district-wide school improvement goals related to ELLs. This will ensure that all schools are getting the same trainings that are aligned with district goals on matters of ELL growth (Bohon et al., 2017). Teachers should be made aware of the professional development sessions for the year ahead of time. This could be in the form a professional development calendar, similar to the yearly school calendar that includes important dates for the school year. Notifying teachers ahead of time about the professional development sessions for the year will allow

teachers to plan accordingly to make sure they are in attendance. The trainings should vary in their times and locations to allow for flexibility and curb monotony. Some professional development trainings could be held during school day, after school, and right before long school breaks. Data should be kept of the trainings each teacher attends to hold teachers and school administrators accountable for teacher growth. The data could be collected in the form of post professional development feedback surveys and a professional development training record. The district should also set a standard for the number of professional development hours a teacher should have each year to be held in acceptable standing as an ELL teacher.

Professional Learning Community

Professional learning communities (PLCs), if established properly, could become a self-sustaining norm of a school's culture (Gutierez, 2016; Zhang, Liu, & Wang, 2017). The second recommendation is to create a school based PLC where all stakeholders could be involved. A PLC is a highly collaborative method of teacher learning and should have the full support of all school personnel, especially the school leader (Kennedy, 2016; Park et al., 2019; Voelkel Jr, & Chrispeels, 2017b; Cheng & Wu, 2016). The teachers in the study by Park et al. (2019) and Voelkel Jr, and Chrispeels (2017b) all reported that they felt supported by their school leaders during their PLC efforts to collaborate and improve instructional practices. PLC groups could also help to provide campuses with autonomy over the needs of the school. They could allow schools to meet their individual school goals for their ELLs by tailoring their PLCs to meet the needs to their ELLs. PLCs could be created based on the varying levels of teacher knowledge about teaching ELLs

and school wide areas of growth for ELLs (Hairon et al., 2017; Penner-Williams et al., 2017). The PLC groups would function as ongoing professional development trainings on a school wide level that could even be linked to the topics from the district wide professional development trainings and serve as extensions of the larger district wide trainings (Kennedy, 2016). Teachers would be able to work in small groups, that would provide a low risk environment where teachers felt safe sharing their challenges and areas of growth, to target specific learner needs (Steeg ,2016; Thoma et al., 2017). Then, put into action the strategies or best practices that they discussed during the PLC sessions to track progress and growth and assess if their collaborative efforts were yielding positive results (Schaap & de Bruijn, 2018).

Another way PLCs could be conducted is through the use of technology. Online PLCs could provide educators with a range of flexibility and ease on how and when to contact their peers to discuss various school topics (Zhang et al., 2017). Teachers may find that having the option of collaborating with colleagues online is more efficient which could lead to more teachers engaging in professional dialogue about their instructional practices that could lead to impactful instructional changes and student growth (Zhang et al., 2017).

Balanced Literacy

The third recommendation is to implement a district wide balanced literacy program that all schools could follow. Lombardi and Behrman (2016), Steeg (2016), and Tompkins (2018) all agreed that a balanced literacy approach makes effective use of reading and writing strategies, guided reading and small group instruction, writing

activities, and independent practice by students. Current literature on balanced literacy showed that school districts recommended the use of a balanced literacy approach and concluded positive results from its use (Hoff, 2017). Further support of a balanced literacy approach comes from a study by Graham et al. (2018) who analyzed 38 studies that tested the impact of balanced literacy on reading performance. They found that balanced literacy programs that were based on cooperative learning helped to improve overall reading performance.

A balanced literacy program would also help to standardize best practices and make use of effective resources at all schools across the district. This would positively impact how PLCs are conducted. If a balanced literacy program was implemented across the district, teachers would be able to collaborate with any teacher in the district, not just teachers at their campus, because they all would be familiar with the balanced literacy program and resources. Therefore, their collaborative efforts could be spent refining how they plan and deliver their literacy lessons and sharing effective ways to use the balanced literacy resources that would best help learners. Balanced literacy resources could easily be accessed from educational publishers or created by teachers, which is what teachers in my study experienced, showing that it would not be difficult to implement a balanced literacy program across all schools in the school district (Robinson, Lambert, Towner, & Caros, 2016).

It is also recommended that technology be a part of the balanced literacy program. The teachers in my study reported positive results in student reading performance when they used the online reading program purchased by the district. Lombardi and Behrman

(2016) also reported positive results from a balanced literacy program where students used computers to practice comprehension, vocabulary, and spelling.

Reflection

The fourth recommendation focuses on reflection. The act of reflecting is an important part of continuous learning and growth because it is an opportunity for teachers to examine their practices for improvement and make adjustments that lead to positive impacts on teaching and learning (Bohon, McKelvey, Rhodes, & Robnolt, 2017; Steeg, 2016). As part of the professional development program, it is recommended that teachers keep a reflection journal. The reflection journal would include reflections based on lesson strengths and areas for improvement (Garin & Harper, 2016). The reflections would be shared during ongoing PLC meetings in order to be effective in giving and receiving feedback that teachers could use with ELLs immediately (Garin & Harper, 2016; Penner-Williams, Díaz, & Worthen, 2017). Penner-Williams et al. (2017) found that the teachers in their study valued the reflections that were formed during their professional development experience because they caused them to evaluate their instructional practices more closely.

Conclusion

The school reform that took place in Abu Dhabi in 2010 changed the way the curriculum had been delivered. English was added to the curriculum as a teaching medium. Students were now being expected to be proficient speakers, readers, and writers in both Arabic, the official language of the country, and English. However, school test data consistently showed gaps in English reading.

This white paper summarizes the doctoral study that investigated the instructional practices of EMTs at a school district in Abu Dhabi. The doctoral study was a qualitative case study that focused on the guiding question: What do EMTs perceive as being the best approaches for improving the English literacy passing rate among ELLs? Krashen's monitor model was used as the conceptual framework. Fifteen third through fifth grade teachers were interviewed from the school district. Data were collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Then, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and uncover three themes. The three themes that emerged were used to develop the recommendations to solve the problem of low English reading achievement among ELLs in the target school district. Four recommendations were made and, if implemented together, could lead to increased student achievement in the acquisition of English reading for ELLs, increased teacher knowledge and skills, and a stronger school community.

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Appendix B: Invitation Letter to Participate in the ELL Study

(Date)
(Name of Teacher)
(Name of School)

Dear (Name of Teacher),

My name is Roxanna Gario. I am an employee with (Z school district) at XY school. I am currently working towards my Ed.D. at Walden University under the supervision of Dr. Professor. I am writing to request your participation in my study. Your participation will include interviews to collect data on the best approaches used by English medium teachers that help English language learners (ELLs) succeed in English reading. Permission to conduct research in the district has been granted by the district office.

The topic of my study is teachers of English language learners (ELLs). The research will include 3rd-5th grade English medium reading teachers. The data collected will be used to create a project that can be used by the district to support ELLs based on the needs that are identified through the data collection process.

Participation is voluntary. All information collected during the study will be confidential. Your name will not be mentioned. If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind, you may exit the study at any time without consequence. The consent form will discuss background information, voluntary nature of the study, procedures, risks and benefits of the study, compensation, confidentiality, and contact information. Once interviews are conducted and have been transcribed, you will be asked to participate in member checking, which allows you to review the transcribed interview to ensure creditability of the finding and interpretations. At the completion of the study, I will provide you with the results and discuss the findings with you at your request.

The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that it meets ethical and federal regulations. You are free to discuss your participation with the research study staff at any time.

I hope you will agree to participate in my research study. If you agree to participate, please reply with “I Consent” as soon as possible. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at XXX@waldenu.edu.

Respectfully Yours,

Roxanna Gario
Ed.D. Student, Walden University

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation to School District

(insert date)

(Name of school district personnel),

I am currently an English Head of Faculty working at a school in (insert school district) and I am working towards my Ed.D. at Walden University under the supervision of Dr. Professor. I am writing to request permission to conduct research in the district on the best approach used by English Medium Teachers (EMTs) in helping ELLs achieve academic success in English reading. I believe this study will be beneficial to the district and I hope that you will partner with me and allow me to conduct my study in a cycle 1 school.

A proposal of the doctoral study is attached for your review. Data will be collected using an interview protocol.

Before the study begins, an application will be submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that my research is in compliance with Walden University's ethical standards as well as U.S. federal regulations. A copy of the approval will be submitted to the district if permission to conduct the study within an (name of district) cycle 1 school is granted.

The confidentiality of all participants will be respected and all information will be kept under secure conditions. Participant's identities will not be revealed in any way.

Thank you for your consideration. I will be happy to share the results of this study with you. I am requesting that you respond to this request to document that I have received your permission to collect data within an (name of district) cycle 1 school.

Respectfully Yours,

Roxanna Gario
Ed.D. Student

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for 3rd -5th Grade Teachers

Date of Interview_____ Start Time: _____
End Time: _____ Place: _____
Interviewer_____ Interviewee_____

Demographic Information

- What is your current position?
- How many years have you been a teacher?
- How many years have you been teaching at the current school?
- How many years have you been a teacher with the school district?
- What population do you serve?
- What is your educational background (i.e., degrees, content areas, special certifications)?

Interview Questions

1. Discuss how you approach teaching English reading to English language learners (ELLs).

2. How often do you receive training on how to teach ELLs English reading?

3. Discuss the types of English reading trainings you have received.

4. How effective do you feel the trainings have been in helping you meet the needs of your ELL students?

5. Discuss the English reading readiness of your ELL students when they started with you.

6. Describe your current English reading program.

7. If students are unsuccessful in English reading, what do you do?
8. How do you use data to make decisions on the needs of your students?
    - What data do you use?
    - How do you measure student's progress over the course of the year?

9. What resources do you use to teach English reading?
    - What resources do you think would be effective in helping ELLs in English reading?

10. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix E: Letter to English Medium Teacher Panel of Experts for the Interview Protocol

(Date)
(Name of Teacher)
(Name of School)

Dear (Name of Teacher),

My name is Roxanna Gario. I work in Z school district at XY boy's school with. I am currently working towards my Ed.D. at Walden University under the supervision of Dr. Professor. I am writing to request your participation in my study. Your participation will include one interview, which will last approximately 30 minutes, to analyze the interview questions I will use in the study. You were chosen for this study because you are a 3rd-5th grade English medium teacher (EMT) with the (school district name). Permission to conduct research in the district has been granted by the district office.

The topic of my study is teachers of English language learners (ELLs). I will investigate the best approach used by EMTs in helping ELLs achieve academic success in English reading. Participation is voluntary. All information collected during the interview will be confidential. Your name will not be mentioned.

I hope you will agree to participate in analyzing the interview questions for the study. If you agree to participate, please reply to the email with "I Consent" as soon as possible. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at XXX@waldenu.edu.

Respectfully Yours,

Roxanna Gario
Ed.D. Student, Walden University