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# Exploring Elementary Education Teachers' Instruction of Academic Language for English Language Learners

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Irina Malykhina

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Exploring Elementary Education Teachers' Instruction of Academic Language for English Language Learners

by

Irina Malykhina

MA, University of Puget Sound, United States, 2006

BS, Teachers Training University, Russia, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

March 2021

## Abstract

General education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies are challenged with incorporating academic language instruction into content instruction for English language learners (ELLs). Little is known about how general education teachers use instructional strategies for teaching academic language to ELLs. A deeper understanding of teacher experiences with implementing academic language instruction to ELLs can help guide future efforts to collaborate on implementation for effective literacy programs that address ELLs' academic language needs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how elementary general education teachers plan, implement, and assess academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs. The conceptual framework for this study included Cummins theory of second language acquisition. The participants included 10 general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies at diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. Teacher questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were utilized to answer the research questions. Data were analyzed via open and axial coding to generate the themes. The study findings revealed that elementary general education teachers believed that implementing academic language instruction that included instructional strategies and assessments in all four language domains, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing, was essential for academic success of ELLs. This study's findings may positively affect social change by informing stakeholders' efforts to develop and implement teacher professional development to support general education teachers' efforts to provide academic language instruction to ELLs.

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# Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord Jesus Christ, to my daughter Lisa and all educators who are committed to inspiring and empowering every child to reach their highest potential and fulfill their life's purpose.

Acknowledgments

I extend my sincere thanks to Dr. Ellen Scales, Dr. Billie Andersson and Dr. Heather Caldwell for their ongoing support and guidance throughout the entire process of completing this dissertation.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Due to the rapid increase of the English language learner (ELL) population in the United States, there is an urgent need for general education teachers to have specialized knowledge and skills to provide effective literacy instruction to ELLs in all content areas. Academic language is a critical component of literacy instruction. Academic language is the means for students to make meaning of content in each discipline because it involves knowledge of higher-order academic vocabulary that is content specific (Cummins, 1979; Gupta, 2019; Ramos, 2017). To be able to read and write about learned content in math, science, social studies, and language arts, ELLs must have command of specific academic vocabulary that is used in academic texts in each content area (Page & Smith, 2018; Thomas & Collier, 2010). Researchers have emphasized the importance of developing and implementing effective academic language instruction that focuses on building ELLs' proficiency of academic vocabulary in all subject areas (Gupta, 2019; Harman & Wood, 2018; Ramos, 2017). To support ELLs' academic growth and to help them make sense of new learning, elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, social studies, and science must have content-specific linguistic knowledge and know how to provide effective academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs across all content areas. (Page & Smith, 2018; Wissink & Stark, 2019).

To prepare teachers for effective academic language instruction, teacher education programs at colleges and universities include courses for teaching academic language to students whose language is other than English (Gonzales, 2016; Ramos, 2017; Wissink & Stark, 2019). Public schools, however, struggle implementing effective literacy programs

to meet academic needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students (Artigliere, 2019; Hadjioannou et al., 2016). Little is known about general education teachers' successful use of instructional strategies for academic language growth of ELLs (Artigliere, 2019; Hadjioannou, et al., 2016; Kapoyannis, 2019).

In this qualitative case study, I attempted to gain a deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' experiences with planning and implementing instructional approaches and strategies to improve ELLs' academic language proficiency in language arts, math, science, and social studies. This qualitative case study contributes to a positive social change by providing information about elementary general education teachers' use of instructional practices that could lead to improvements in the development of academic language skills and literacy outcomes for ELLs.

In Chapter 1, I provide evidence of the significance of implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. Though teacher preparation programs have specific courses to address the educational needs of ELLs, and teachers are trained to use instructional methods for academic language instruction, research about effective implementation of those methods is limited. The remaining sections of Chapter 1 include: (a) the problem statement, (b) purpose of the study, (c) research questions, (d) conceptual framework, (e) nature of the study, (f) definitions, (g) assumptions, (h), scope and delimitations, (i) limitations, (j) significance of the study, and (k) summary.

## Background

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) place significant academic language demands on all students, including ELLs (Johnson & Wells, 2017). To meet the demands

of CCSS and demonstrate required growth on grade-level literacy assessments, ELLs must use higher-level vocabulary and have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content (August et al., 2016; Echevarria et al., 2016). Researchers have shown that ELLs must learn both academic language and content at the same time (Master et al., 2016). To ensure ELLs' language development and academic growth in each content area, teachers must know how to teach academic language and content simultaneously (Wissink & Stark, 2019).

Many teacher preparation programs require teachers to complete specialized ELL courses that focus on effective academic language instruction for ELLs (Gonzales, 2016; Ramos, 2017; Wissink & Stark, 2019). School districts across the country provide training opportunities for teachers to support academic language instruction, with specific focus on teaching academic vocabulary (Cavazos et al., 2018; Hadjioannou et al., 2016). Schools with high ELL populations require that general education teachers participate in job-embedded professional development to support effective academic language instruction to ELLs in all content areas (Cavazos et al., 2018).

The scope of this study surrounded elementary general education teachers' views and opinions about their experiences with implementing instructional approaches to support development of academic language and academic vocabulary as part of academic language acquisition for ELLs. The importance of this focus lays in the effective implementation of academic language instruction. There is a gap in the research surrounding the topic of general education teachers implementing effective instructional approaches to support academic language growth of ELLs (Artigliere, 2019; Hadjioannou

et al., 2016). This qualitative case study generated a deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' experiences with implementing academic vocabulary instruction that improves ELLs' academic language proficiency. The findings of the qualitative case study may lead to the design of the professional development that can help enhance teachers' understanding of how to plan and implement effective academic language instruction for ELLs.

## Problem Statement

The problem that I addressed in this qualitative case study was elementary education teachers' use of instructional strategies for teaching academic language to ELLs. Researchers have shown that due to rapidly growing ELL enrollment in U.S. schools, there is an urgent need for general education teachers to have specialized knowledge and skills to meet the unique academic language needs of ELLs (Gupta, 2019; Ramos, 2017; Wissink & Stark, 2019). Teachers need to know how to develop and implement effective literacy programs that incorporate students' home language and cultural backgrounds, while building a foundation for academic learning and language use (Gupta, 2019; Harman & Wood, 2018; Ramos, 2017; Wissink & Stark, 2019). To teach ELLs effectively, state departments of education require teacher preparation programs to include courses that focus on teaching students whose language is other than English and to incorporate academic language instruction into content area instruction (Gonzales, 2016; Ramos, 2017). However, there is gap in the research about teacher use of academic language instructional strategies for ELLs. Little is known about teachers' implementation of effective academic language instruction to ELLs, and schools still

struggle to have cohesive, comprehensive programs to meet the academic needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students (Artigliere, 2019; Hadjioannou et al., 2016).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' instruction of academic language for ELLs. Academic language instruction is an essential aspect of literacy instruction because it provides opportunities for ELLs to learn content-specific academic vocabulary and it improves ELLs' ability to construct meaning from a variety of print materials, which is a challenging task for many students (Echevarria et al., 2016). In this dissertation, I addressed the gap between research evidence about best practices concerning effective academic language and literacy instruction for ELLs and what was taking place in academic language instruction in the local educational settings. A deeper understanding of teacher experiences with instructional approaches and strategies for ELLs is beneficial because it might inform stakeholders' efforts to develop and implement effective literacy programs that meet ELLs' learning needs and improve academic language proficiency (Gupta, 2019).

## Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1). How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?

Research Question 2 (RQ2). How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content?

Research Question 3 (RQ3). How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study included Cummins' (1979) theory of second language acquisition, which outlines the distinction between the acquisition of two types of language: basic interpersonal communications skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS are language skills that people need in social situations. This type of language is what people use on a day-to-day basis to interact with others. For students, BICS are essential to interact with their peers while they are playing at recess, during team sports activities, at lunchtime, or socializing outside of school. This type of language skill is not profoundly cognitively demanding. BICS usually develop between 6 months and 2 years after families arrive in the United States (Cummins, 1979).

CALP refers to the student's formal academic learning. The CALP concept deals with skills essential to academics, such as listening, reading, speaking, and how to write about the relevant subject matter. Landing these language skills is a crucial concept when it comes to a student's academic success. It takes time and patience for students to become proficient in language skills necessary for academic learning. It could take between 5 and 7 years for a student to acquire the appropriate level skills for their academics. If a student has no prior experience in school or lacks parental support, this process could take up to 10 years. Many young children end up teaching their parents English or their parents choose not to learn the language, which has serious

consequences, both socially and academically. What makes this concept even more complicated is that it also covers such topics as inferring, classifying, comparing, evaluating, and synthesizing language for content matter. If a student is not placed in a bilingual class, processing the English language can be cognitively demanding for the student to learn new ideas, concepts, and the English language concurrently (Cummins, 1979, 1981). Cummins is the founder of this theory and has dedicated a great deal of time and effort to these strategies to improve the learning experience for ELL students.
By separating these language learning concepts, teachers can better understand the different ways to teach ELLs and bilingual students. I will discuss the concepts of BICS and CALP, and their influence on ELLs' academic progress, further in Chapter 2.

The main purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of K–5 general education teachers' instructional approaches and strategies to improve ELLs' academic language and their performance outcomes in literacy assessments. Because of ELLs' basic communication competence, teachers assume that they can handle academic tasks that are cognitively demanding, and they do not understand why ELLs encounter difficulties understanding and completing schoolwork (Chamot, 2009). Educators will have a better ability to choose and implement effective instructional strategies for teaching academic language to ELLs if they have a good understanding of the distinction between BICS and CALP and their development timelines.

Students' levels of BICS and CALP development should be taken into account when planning and implementing academic language instruction. To demonstrate success in CALP, ELLs are required to display knowledge of high-level academic vocabulary and

academic language conventions (Cummins, 2009). It is essential that teachers understand ELLs' academic language needs and provide rich and meaningful instruction that supports development of higher-level academic vocabulary and oral and written academic language proficiency for ELLs (Cummins, 2009; Echevarria, et al., 2016).

## Nature of the Study

I conducted this qualitative case study within the qualitative research framework. Qualitative research alludes to research about people's lives, behaviors, experiences, and feelings, as well as about organizational operations (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative researchers seek to understand individuals' experiences in specific real-life settings and produce findings that come naturally from real-world situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Golafshani, 2003). Quantitative researchers, on the other hand, focus on the facets of individuals' behaviors that can be quantified and patterned instead of just exploring them and interpreting their meaning (Rahman, 2017). Quantitative researchers use data collection instruments designed to fit various experiences into set response categories.

Structured interviews, with a predetermined set of close-ended questions, are used for quantitative data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Interviews conducted during qualitative research studies include open-ended questions, provide detailed insights into participants' experiences, and produce qualitative data that aligned with qualitative research methodology (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers use qualitative data gathered from interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' interactions and their subjective interpretations of the experiences and

events in the context where they had firsthand encounters with the topic of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

When researchers choose design and methodology for their studies, they must consider the purpose and the nature of the research and ensure that there is a clear relationship between research questions and the research methodology used to address these questions (Butin, 2010; Rahman, 2017). The research questions in this study were analytical in nature and were designed with the purpose to gain deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' experiences with planning and implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. Because of the nature of the research questions, I conducted a qualitative study in which I used basic qualitative analysis. I conducted individual, semistructured interviews with a select group of elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies in diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. I also used a preinterview questionnaire that was sent to the study participants as a professional courtesy prior to the interviews. The preinterview questionnaire allowed the participants to share initial thoughts about implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. I used both the preinterview questionnaire and individual semistructured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' use of instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs.

Researchers use qualitative data to gain a deeper understanding of behaviors, interactions, and insights from participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I collected the qualitative data for this study using (a) a preinterview questionnaire and (b) individual

semistructured interviews with 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, social studies, and science in culturally and linguistically diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. I organized and analyzed the collected data by using two coding cycles. The first coding cycle included selecting a priori codes that aligned with the conceptual framework of this qualitative case study, followed by identifying open codes that emerged from the collected data. The second coding cycle included axial coding. I incorporated these methods of data collection and data analysis in the study to increase the knowledge and understanding of how elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies plan for academic vocabulary instruction, assess its effectiveness, and select instructional strategies for academic language development and academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs.

Academic language proficiency involves the use of higher-level vocabulary and includes the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content (Cummins, 1979, 1981). It is measured through a variety of formative assessments in language arts, science, math, and social studies. In addition, once a year, ELLs take a required summative language proficiency assessment titled Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS). The ACCESS measures academic progress in listening, speaking, reading and writing. The ACCESS composite score determines ELLs' language proficiency level. There are six language proficiency levels: Level 1, Entering; Level 2, Emerging; Level 3, Developing; Level 4, Expanding; Level 5,

Bridging; and Level 6, Reaching. When ELLs reach Level 5, they are considered proficient in academic language and exit from ELL program.

## Definitions

*Academic content*: Core academic curriculum in English language arts (ELA), math, science, and social studies (Umansky, 2016).

*Academic vocabulary*: The vocabulary that is mainly used in academic settings and academic texts (Alhojailan, 2019; Page & Smith, 2018).

*Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS):* Day-to-day language skills needed to interact socially with other people (Collier, 2001). ELLs develop BICS within 6 months to 2 years after arrival in the United States (Collier, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2010).

*Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP):* CALP refers to formal academic learning and includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing about learned content material (Collier, 2001; Thomas & Collier 2010). CALP involves the use of higher-level vocabulary and more advanced sentence structure and means of expression than social language (Cummins, 1979, 1981). It usually takes from 5 to 7 years to develop.

*English language learners (ELLs):* ELLs are learners who have a first language other than English or who have not developed English language proficiency (Callahan & Hopkins, 2017).

## Assumptions

As a qualitative researcher, I understood that the data collection and data interpretation process during this qualitative case study might be viewed as subjective. Qualitative research "seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Therefore, the data gathered from the participants might be viewed as subjective because it could include participants' biases. I assumed that the participating teachers would be frank and provide reliable data. Participants were expected to honestly answer the interview questions to the best of their knowledge. This was essential because their views and opinions informed the findings of this qualitative case study that involved selected general education teachers from kindergarten to fifth grade. I also assumed that my presence did not have any influence on the study participants and the responses they provided.

## Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this qualitative case study encompassed elementary general education teachers' views and opinions about their experiences with academic language instruction for ELLs. The importance of this focus lays in the effective implementation of instructional practices that support ELLs' simultaneous acquisition of academic language and the required academic content. This qualitative case study included 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies at culturally and linguistically diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of

the United States. Because my focus was to explore general education teachers' experiences with academic language instruction for ELLs in general education classroom setting, students who receive special education services were not included in this study, and other models of delivery of ELL instruction, including dual language model, were not investigated. The transferability of this qualitative case study was set to the degree that other researchers may be able to generalize more studies to explore the opinions and views of teachers' instructional approaches for ELLs in other grades and other subject areas.

## Limitations

There was one limitation to this qualitative case study. This limitation was due to only involving elementary general education teachers who teach in public schools. The participants of this qualitative case study included 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies in culturally and linguistically diverse public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. Therefore, the findings of this qualitative case study may not be representative of all elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. My objective for this qualitative case study was to conduct individual semistructured interviews. To limit biases, the research setting guidance of this study excluded acquaintances and/or friends that could influence the results of the study.

## Significance

A continuous increase of the ELL population in the United States has created a pressing need for general education teachers to have specialized knowledge and skills to provide effective academic language instruction to ELLs. Researchers and educators recognize an urgent need to teach academic language and content simultaneously to ELLs. ELLs must have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content using academic vocabulary that is content-specific. State departments of education require that teacher preparation programs have specialized ELL courses to enhance teachers' knowledge of second language acquisition and equip them with strategies for effective academic language instruction. School districts implement teacher trainings that focus on instructional strategies for teaching academic language and content to ELLs.

In this qualitative case study, I sought to gain deeper insights into elementary general education teachers' use of instructional methods and approaches to support the development of academic language for ELLs. The study was important because it addressed the gap in the literature as it related to general education teachers' implementation of effective instructional approaches to support academic language growth of ELLs. My expectation was that this qualitative case study could be used by educators who work with linguistically diverse students as a tool and a resource when designing and implementing instructional approaches and strategies for teaching academic language to ELLs.

This qualitative case study can be viewed as meaningful because I explored the views and opinions of elementary general education teachers about their experiences of using instructional strategies to improve academic language proficiency for ELLs. This research can serve as a resource for educators who are looking for effective instructional approaches for academic language instruction for ELLs. The study findings positively affect social change by increasing teaching expertise and instructional effectiveness for educators who directly work with linguistically diverse students. In addition, social change emphasis is to involve stakeholders in the transformation of organizations. Gaining deeper insights about teachers' experiences with teaching academic language to ELLs helps to ensure that academic language instruction is not only implemented with fidelity, but also with the understanding to encourage the effectiveness and reliability of implemented academic language instruction through teacher buy-in.

## Summary

In summary, academic language instruction can be viewed as a mainspring for ELLs' literacy development and academic achievement. Implementing academic language instruction with fidelity and understanding across all content areas is imperative for the academic success of ELLs. Effective academic language gives ELLs opportunities to learn the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content using academic vocabulary that is content-specific. When ELLs have a good command of academic language, they can accurately demonstrate their knowledge of the required content by using all four language domains with confidence and expertise. The purpose

of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' experiences with academic language instruction for ELLs.

Chapter 2 consists of an overview of past and most current literature pertaining to the importance of teaching academic language to ELLs, teacher readiness to provide effective academic language instruction to ELLs, teacher professional development, second language development as it relates to BICS and CALP, and teachers' views and perspectives on their experiences of academic language instruction for ELLs. I will discuss the unique issues associated with teaching academic language to ELLs in detail in the review of the literature.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that I addressed in this qualitative case study was that despite training in the use of appropriate instructional methods, little is known about general education teachers' instruction of academic language to ELLs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' experiences with academic language instruction to ELLs. My goal for this qualitative case study was to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?

RQ2. How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content?

RQ3. How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition?

Chapter 2 contains a review of the research and literature related to general education teachers' experiences with teaching academic language to ELLs. It also includes literature review strategy, conceptual framework, a detailed description of the literature review, and the study's summary.

The continuous growth of ELL enrollment in the United States K–12 schools has created an urgent need to develop and implement effective literacy instruction that builds a strong foundation for ELLs' academic learning and language use. (Gupta, 2019; Harman & Wood, 2018; Kapoyannis, 2019; Ramos, 2017; Wissink & Stark, 2019). Academic language instruction is an essential aspect of literacy instruction because it

provides opportunities for ELLs to learn content-specific academic vocabulary, which is needed to construct meaning from a variety of print materials (Echevarria et al., 2016). General education teachers must know how to teach academic language and content simultaneously because ELLs must have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content using higher-level academic vocabulary (Cummins, 2000, 2009; Echevarria et al., 2016; Johnson & Wells, 2017; Wissink & Stark, 2019).

To ensure that general education teachers have specialized knowledge and skills to provide effective academic language instruction to ELLs, teacher preparation programs include courses that cover teaching students whose first language is not English, focusing on incorporating academic language instruction into content instruction (Gonzales, 2016; Gupta, 2019; Ramos, 2017). State departments of education provide opportunities for general education teachers to participate in professional development offerings to enhance their skills for effective academic language and content instruction to ELLs (Babinski et al., 2018; Cavazos et al., 2018; Hadjioannou et al., 2016). Yet, schools still struggle to have effective literacy programs to meet academic needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Little is known about general education teachers' successful use of instructional strategies for academic language instruction for ELLs (Artigliere, 2019; Hadjioannou et al., 2016; Kapoyannis, 2019**).**

## Literature Search Strategy

I conducted an exhaustive manual and electronic search of the literature, I searched Walden University's electronic database, SAGE, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), books, journal articles, websites, and published dissertations.

In addition, I used Google Scholar, Infotopia, and the Virtual Learning Resources Center to search for the relevant literature. I initially focused on examining the literature related to academic language instruction for ELLs. Some key terms during the literature search included *academic language* and *ELLs,* with different combinations of mentioned terms. I also used the following keywords: *ELLs, BICS, CALP, academic language, academic vocabulary, academic content, literacy, general education teachers,* and *instruction.*

I examined all articles that matched the aspects of this qualitative case study, which were teachers' views and opinions about their readiness to provide academic language instruction to ELLs and the effectiveness of professional development that addresses teaching academic language and content simultaneously. The literature search returned numerous articles. After close analysis of the summaries, some of them were not relevant to the focus of this qualitative case study. I selected the articles that closely related to the focus of this study for further review. The focus of this qualitative case study was to explore general education teachers' experiences with teaching academic language to ELLs; therefore, I gave priority to research articles related to elementary general education teachers who work with linguistically diverse students.

I conducted a manual search for recently published, peer-reviewed articles that focused on general education teachers' experiences with academic language instruction for ELLs. As a result of the search, I found several articles. I examined the reference lists of the selected articles to determine relevancy. If the author of a chosen article cited another author, I followed up and read the original source.

Academic language instruction for ELLs is challenging to research because it can be viewed as a mixture of various instructional practices and theories. Many best practices for ELL instruction are combined in this integrated instructional approach. Currently, a large body of research available focuses on the importance of academic language instruction to ELLs and ways to prepare general education teachers to teach academic language and content simultaneously to ELLs. Research relative to the successful implementation of academic language instruction in elementary general education classrooms is limited. This gap in research provided the rationale for exploration into the views and opinions of elementary general education teachers' experiences with the use of instructional approaches to improve ELL's academic language proficiency.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study included Cummins' (1979) theory of second language acquisition, which outlines the distinction between the acquisition of two types of language: BICS and CALP. According to Cummins, BICS includes social language skills that develop within 6 months to 2 years. CALP involves formal academic language proficiency and takes between 5 and 7 to acquire. CALP requires ELLs to have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content and involves the use of higher-level vocabulary and more advanced sentence structure and means of expression than social language (Cummins, 1979). BICS is not cognitively demanding. Students need BICS when they socialize. CALP refers to the student's formal academic

learning and deals with skills that are essential to academics, such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Cummins, 1979).

## Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

### Conceptual Framework

Cummins' (1979) theory of second language acquisition informed the theoretical framework of this qualitative case study. In his theory of second language acquisition, Cummins makes the distinction between the acquisition of two types of language: BICS and CALP. Cummins asserted that BICS is a day-to-day language needed to interact socially with others, while CALP is directly related to IQ and other aspects of academic achievement. Cummins' distinction between BICS and CALP drew educators' and researchers' attention to academic challenges that ELLs encounter and to the reasons behind the low academic achievement of ELLs, compared to their native-speaking peers (Khatib, 2016).

The primary theoretical goal of introducing the BICS/CALP distinction was to dispute Oller's (1979) claim that individual levels of language proficiency are determined by just one factor: global language proficiency. Cummins (1979) argued that it is controversial to include all aspects of language performance into only one form of global language proficiency. For example, there is a significant difference between a 12-year-old and a 6-year-old monolingual English-speaking student's vocabulary knowledge and ability to read and write, but there is a minimal difference in phonology and language fluency. That is to say, some aspects of language proficiency, including phonology, plateau after early stages of schooling, while other aspects, including knowledge of

vocabulary, continue developing throughout the lifetime. According to Cummins (1979), these different aspects of language proficiency cannot be considered as one single proficiency dimension. Cummins (1979) further asserted that though both CALP and BICS start developing through social interaction from birth, CALP becomes different from BICS after the early years of schooling to represent primarily the language that students acquire at school and need to know and use to succeed academically. CALP is specific to the context of schooling; therefore, it can be defined as "the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling" (Cummins, 2000, p. 67).

Cummins (1981) conducted two research studies to demonstrate the pertinence of the BICS/CALP distinction for ELLs' academic performance. In an analysis of more than 400 teacher referrals and psychological assessments performed on ELLs in a large Canadian school system, Cummins revealed that there was a common assumption among teachers and psychologists that as long as students could converse in English, they should not have academic difficulties. As a result of that assumption, many students were identified as having learning disabilities, even though they had been exposed to English for fewer than 3 years. The study findings showed that educators and policymakers frequently combined conversational and academic English language proficiency in one language dimension, which significantly contributed to creating academic challenges for ELLs. Cummins further reinforced the need to distinguish between BICS and CALP by analyzing language performance data from the Toronto Board of Education. The data analysis findings revealed that ELLs usually became proficient in BICS within 2 years of

exposure to English, but it took them 5 to 7 years to acquire CALP, because CALP requires ELLs to have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content; use more advanced sentence structure; and know how to compare, synthesize, evaluate, and infer (Cummins, 2009; Thomas & Collier, 2010).

Knowledge of the distinction between BICS and CALP is essential because it directly impacts the quality of classroom instruction (Chamot, 2009; Collier, 2001; Cummins, 2009; Thomas & Collier, 2010). Frequently, because of ELLs' basic communication competence, general education teachers assume they can handle academic tasks that are cognitively demanding. Teachers do not understand why ELLs encounter difficulties understanding and completing school work (Chamot, 2009). To ensure ELLs' academic success, teachers must understand their linguistic needs and provide rich and meaningful instruction that supports ELLs' academic language growth (Cummins, 2009). Echevarria et al. (2016) supported Cummins' (2009) argument, stating that the educational success of ELLs depends on teachers' ability to develop and implement effective academic language and literacy instruction for these students.

Academic vocabulary instruction should be an essential component of academic language instruction. Knowledge of words and phrases that are widely used in academic disciplines supports academic language proficiency and improves ELLs' ability to construct meaning from a variety of complex texts (Echevarria et al., 2016). In this qualitative case study, I interviewed general education teachers from local elementary public schools to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences using instructional strategies for academic vocabulary instruction.

**ELL Education History in the United States**

ELL education in the United States has a long history. It started during the earliest settlements in North America. Individuals with various cultural and language backgrounds arrived in the New World at a rapid pace. As a result of this massive immigration, more than 18 languages were commonly spoken in the 17th and 18th centuries throughout the territories that would eventually become the modern United States (Russo, 2008).

Many schools embraced bilingual education at that time. Starting in the 20th century, however, schools experienced a shift in attitudes toward bilingualism and multiculturalism. Students were increasingly required to assimilate into English-speaking environments and had to either learn English or be left behind. Between the 1920s and 1960s, the need for ESL education was largely ignored until the government officially sanctioned bilingual programs (Russo, 2008).

In 1968, the U.S. Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act (BEA), which officially acknowledged the need for appropriate ELL programs to prevent non-English speakers from remaining in poverty and cultural isolation (Valencia, 2002). The BEA was a critical piece of legislation and became an important part of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Escamila, 2018). The BEA did not explicitly require bilingual instruction or the use of the student's native language for educational purposes, but encouraged the design of innovative programs to teach English. The BEA also placed priority on programs for low-income families, and ELLs from moderate-income families were not part of those programs (Escamila, 2018). The BEA offered few guidelines for

the ELL instruction, giving schools and school districts freedom to create programs to support ELLs' academic growth. Creating bilingual education programs included possible ELL placement into special classes, which could lead to the violation of desegregation laws, many of which were English-only laws. Introducing bilingual education programs was against the law in some states.

The lack of more consistent guidance for ELL services across school districts became a growing concern for the Office of Civil Rights (OCR; Russo, 2008). In 1970, the OCR issued a memorandum about the rights of ELLs in public schools. According to the memorandum, school districts had to take affirmative steps to provide equal educational opportunities for ELLs. The OCR memorandum explicitly stated that school districts violated federal law if students were excluded from active participation in school because of their inability to speak and understand the language of instruction, national origin minority students were inappropriately assigned to special education classes because of their lack of English skills, or programs for students whose English was less than proficient were not designed to teach them English as soon as possible (Russo, 2008). The OCR memorandum provided more guidance for ELL services compared to bilingual education. Only a few school districts, however, responded to the memorandum by adopting ELL and bilingual programs (Russo, 2008). Non-English-speaking students and their parents continued bringing their concerns about ELL programs in public schools to the attention of federal courts (Russo, 2008; Valdes, 2017).

In 1974, *Lau v. Nichols* was initiated in the Supreme Court. The basis for the case was the claim that ELLs could not understand the language of instruction, which deprived them of equal access to quality education. The Supreme Court ruled that providing ELLs with the same textbooks, curriculum, facilities, and teachers did not mean access to equal educational opportunities. Equal education is only possible if students can understand the language of instruction (Russo, 2008). This case decision changed the way most educators and policymakers thought of bilingual education. It put ELLs' rights to quality education at the center of educational policy and triggered the passing of the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) in 1974 (Callahan et al., 2019).

The EEOA mandated that no state could deny equal educational opportunities to individuals "by the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by students in an instructional program" (EEOA, 1974, Section 17039[f]). The EEOA was an important piece of legislation because it defined what constituted the denial of educational opportunities. However, the EEOA did not provide the definition of appropriate action. As a result, state education agencies created ELL programs based on their understanding of what appropriate action was (Russo, 2008). States needed more guidance around accountability for ELL performance.

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The NCLB allowed states flexibility to choose instructional programs for ELLs, though demanding greater accountability for ELLs' English language and academic progress. States were required to develop English language proficiency standards and to

link them to the state's academic content standards. Schools had to ensure that ELLs were part of their state's accountability system and that ELLs' academic progress was followed over time. To measure and assess the academic progress of ELLs, the NCLB required that in each state, all ELLs take a language proficiency test every year (Russo, 2008). All ELLs who had been in the United States for more than one year had to take state academic achievement tests in language arts and math. The NCLB held all school districts and states accountable for ensuring that ELLs met specific annual targets of adequate yearly progress (AYP; NCLB, 2001). The government believed that by requiring testing, students would automatically receive what they needed to score at proficiency levels on these state assessments (Rice et al., 2014). Schools felt overwhelmed trying to help ELLs reach proficiency on the required exams.

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced the NCLB and became a new law in education. Both NCLB and ESSA focused on high standards and accountability for ELL performance across all states. However, NCLB and ESSA significantly differ when it comes to expectations for English language proficiency among ELLs. The NCLB held schools accountable for improving ELLs' English language proficiency under Title III, which provides funds for supporting ELLs only. Under ESSA, schools must include English proficiency rates into their accountability framework for Title I, which provides funds to support low-income students more broadly. Under ESSA, schools are responsible for the academic performance of each student subgroup, including ELLs. A school will not receive a high rating if one of the subgroups fails academically (ESSA, 2015). If ELLs as a subgroup are not doing well,

the school will be flagged for targeted improvement. Unlike the NCLB, the ESSA requires states, not school districts, to create a uniform process for identifying English learners, for assigning them services, and for exiting them from ELL programs. Despite the policymakers' belief that the new law would improve ELLs' academic performance and create a level of consistency for ELL programs at the state level and nationally, ELLs continue to underperform on required standardized assessments (Valdes, 2017).

**ELLs and the Achievement Gap**

The United States is home to one-fifth of the world's total migrants (Batalova et al., 2018). The increase of migration contributed to the growing number of ELLs in the U.S. public schools across all states. By 2017, 10% or more of public school students were ELLs in 10 states. The states were Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington. California (19.2%) and Texas (18.0%) reported the highest percentage of ELLs among public school students (National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). These numbers look alarming when viewed side by side with academic achievement data reported for ELLs enrolled in the U.S. public schools (Acosta et al., 2019). According to *The Nation's Report Card*, ELLs significantly underperform compared to their English-speaking peers (NCES, 2018). When comparing average scale scores in math for fourth grade students, ELLs scored 220 and non-ELLs scored 243, a difference of 23 points. The discrepancy is even larger in reading. Fourth grade reading scores showed a 33-point difference, placing ELLs in the *below basic* range (NCES, 2018).

The primary reason for ELLs' poor academic performance, compared to their non-ELL peers, is the challenge of learning academic language and content simultaneously (Cardoza & Brown, 2019). ELLs must have command of discipline-specific academic language to demonstrate knowledge of the learned content and to perform well on the standardized tests (Wissink, & Stark, 2019). To close the achievement gap between ELLs and their English-speaking peers, schools must provide timely and adequate instructional support to ELLs and create programs that support ELLs' learning in general education classrooms (Artigliere, 2019; Fisher, & Frey, 2019). State and school district leaders realize that academic language deficiency presents a major learning barrier for ELLs and is the primary reason for the achievement gap (Cardoza & Brown, 2019).

**Second Language Acquisition**

Second language acquisition is a process of learning a second language. Second language acquisition outlines the distinction between the acquisition of two types of language—BICS and CALP (Cummins, 1979). BICS refers to day-to-day conversational skills that are necessary for social interaction, while CALP refers to formal academic learning and involves the use of higher-level vocabulary and more advanced sentence structure and means of expression than social language (Collier, 2001; Cummins, 1979, 2000; Thomas & Collier 2010). According to Cummins (1979) and Collier (2001), ELLs develop BICS within 6 months to 2 years; whereas, CALP requires 5 to 7 years to build.

The primary goal of introducing the BICS/CALP distinction was to dispute Oller's (1979) claim that individual levels of language proficiency are determined by just

one factor, global language proficiency. Cummins (1979) argued that it is controversial to include all aspects of language performance into only one form of global language proficiency. For example, there is a significant difference between a 12-year-old and a 6-year-old monolingual English-speaking student's vocabulary knowledge and their abilities to read and write, but there is a minimal difference in phonology and language fluency. That is to say, some aspects of language proficiency, including phonology, plateau after early stages of schooling, while other aspects, including knowledge of vocabulary, continue developing throughout the lifetime. According to Cummins (1979), these different aspects of language proficiency cannot be considered as one single proficiency dimension. Cummins (2000) further asserted that though both CALP and BICS start developing through social interaction from birth, CALP becomes different from BICS after the early years of schooling to represent primarily the language that students acquire at school and need to know and use to succeed academically. CALP is specific to the context of schooling; therefore, it can be defined as "the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling" (Cummins, 2000, p. 67).

Frequently, when educators visit general education classrooms, they observe that teachers assume that ELLs can handle academic tasks that are cognitively demanding because they have basic communication competence, and teachers do not understand why ELLs encounter difficulties understanding and completing schoolwork (Chamot, 2009). Understanding the process of second language acquisition is essential for planning and implementing effective academic language instruction. General education teachers must

know the distinction between BICS and CALP when they select and teach academic vocabulary to ELLs (Echevarria et al., 2016).

## General Education Teachers' Readiness to Provide Academic Language Instruction to ELLs

To ensure ELL language development and academic growth in each content area, general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies must know how to teach academic language and content simultaneously (Wissink & Stark, 2019). To meet the demands of the CCSS and to demonstrate required growth on grade-level literacy assessments, ELLs must use higher-level vocabulary and have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content (August et al., 2016; Echevarria et al., 2016).

To ensure ELLs' success in the U.S. public schools, teacher preparation programs require teachers to complete specialized ELL courses that focus on effective academic language instruction for ELLs (Gonzales, 2016; Master et al., 2016; Ramos, 2017; Wissink & Stark, 2019). Teacher preparation programs address ELLs' academic language instruction in different ways (Hallman & Meineke, 2016). Several states, like Arizona, require that preservice teachers complete Structured English Immersion (SEI) college coursework, which includes strategies for building background for academic language instruction (Hallman & Meineke, 2016). Teacher preparation programs in Florida, for instance, require preservice teachers to complete up to three specialized ELL courses taught by instructors who have English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL) endorsement (Wissink & Stark, 2019). Wissink and Stark (2019) posited that the

effectiveness of teacher preparation programs can be determined only after preservice general education teachers are employed because they must understand the language needs of the ELLs they are working with. In many cases, however, even after completing specialized ELL courses, general education teachers still need support in planning, implementing and assessing academic language instruction for ELLs (Hadjioannou et al., 2016; Wissink & Stark, 2019).

### *Planning, Implementing, and Managing Instruction*

It is essential that general education teachers demonstrate knowledge and understanding of "evidence-based practices and strategies related to planning, implementing, and managing standards-based ESL and content instruction" (TESOL International Association [TESOL], 2010, p. 43). The implementation of well-designed lessons begins with thoughtful lesson planning. Sahin-Taskin (2017) stated that there is a direct relationship between the quality of lesson planning and classroom instruction. General education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies must consider various factors when planning for academic vocabulary instruction. Echevarría et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of aligning lesson plans to the selected content and language objectives for each lesson. Content objectives should come directly from language arts, math, science, and social studies curriculum. Content objectives should align with content standards and learning outcomes. Language objectives should be based on English language proficiency standards and should support ELLs' development of academic language. According to Echevarría et al., "Content objectives are what students need to learn. Language objectives are what students need to

learn about English to perform academic tasks" (p. 32). Gonzales (2016) supported the importance of using content and language objectives and further noted the importance of aligning students' tasks with the language objectives. Echevarría et al. and Gonzales also highlighted the importance of using ongoing assessments to measure ELLs' progress towards academic language proficiency.

### *Assessment*

Teachers must understand the "issues and concepts of assessment and use standards-based procedures with ELLs" (TESOL, 2010, p. 56) to ensure that assessment and differentiation practices are implemented in the service of their students' learning. ELLs' academic progress towards academic language proficiency should be measured through multiple ongoing formal and informal assessments (Gupta, 2019). Echevarría et al. (2016) agreed with Gupta (2019) and further explained that since teaching academic vocabulary should be at the center of academic language instruction, general education teachers should use ongoing assessments to review key academic vocabulary and provide students with regular feedback about their learning.

### *Teacher Professional Development*

Effective professional development leads to a positive change in teaching practices and improved student performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Hadjioannou et al. (2016) posited that participating in effective professional development can help general education teachers gain knowledge about factors that constitute effective academic language and literacy instruction for ELLs. Gonzales (2016) added that ongoing collaboration between general education teachers and ESOL teachers is essential

to ensure continuity and cohesiveness in implementing academic language instruction. In addition, school administrators and instructional coaches must ensure that general education teacher participation in the professional development is followed by ongoing support with daily planning and implementation of the research-based strategies for effective academic language instruction (Villegas et al., 2018). When such support is ongoing, consistent, data-driven, and reflective, it can lead to improvement in teacher performance and student learning outcomes (Hadjioannou et al., 2016; Wissink & Stark, 2019).

## Models for Implementing ELL Instruction

To support ELLs with academic language and content learning in general education classrooms, states have adopted and implemented various ELL programs. Dual language program and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) are two ELL programs largely used in U.S. public schools. Dual language programs are offered in 39 states and the District of Columbia. Spanish is on the top of the list of partner languages (35 states and the District of Columbia). Other reported partner languages are Chinese (14 states), Native American (12 states), and French (seven states and the District of Columbia). SIOP has increasingly been used by states and school districts. Multiple schools and districts have reported increased ELL academic performance when teachers implement the SIOP model (Echevarria, 2012; Echevarria et al., 2016),

### *Dual Language Programs*

Dual language programs are educational programs in which ELLs learn academic content in their home language and in English (Acosta et al., 2019). The philosophy

behind dual language programs is to support ELLs' transition into a new language and help them become biliterate. When students are biliterate, they demonstrate reading and writing proficiency in both instructional languages (Acosta et al., 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019). Researchers distinguish between one-way and two-way dual language programs. One-way dual language programs include students who have a background in one language to learn the second language. Two-way dual language programs include a mix of students with backgrounds in both languages in one classroom setting (Acosta et al., 2019). For instance, in a one-way dual language program, ELLs would be grouped together and taught their home language and English. In a two-way dual language program, ELLs and English-speaking students would be grouped together to learn two languages simultaneously. Two instructional models used with one-way and two-way dual language programs are 90/10 and 50/50 (Cardoza, & Brown, 2019). The 90/10 model is where 90% of the daily instruction is devoted to teaching content in the ELLs' first language, while 10% of the instructional day is used to teach English language proficiency skills. As the program progresses, time for English language instruction increases until both instructional languages are used equally (Acosta et al., 2019). In the 50/50 dual language model, 50% of the daily instruction is devoted to teaching content in the ELLs' first language, while the other 50% of the instructional day happens in English (Acosta et al., 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019).

Researchers' opinions differ in choosing between 90/10 and 50/50 models. Acosta et al. (2019) and Cardoza and Brown (2019) emphasized the benefits of the 90/10 models over the 50/50 model. They asserted that ELLs perform better academically when they

first have an opportunity to develop strong foundational literacy skills in their native language. As ELLs progress through the English acquisition process, they can transfer literacy skills from their native language to English (Acosta et al., 2019) Cardoza & Brown (2019), on the other hand, stated that the 50/50 model allows students to get used to code switching and helps them master academic language proficiency in both languages of instruction. Despite differences in the dual language model preferences, researchers agree that both the 90/10 model and the 50/50 model of dual language program support higher outcomes for language proficiency and academic achievement for ELLs (Acosta et al., 2019; Cardoza & Brown, 2019).

### *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol*

Sheltered instruction (SI) is a teaching approach that combines academic language and content instruction for ELLs (Krashen, & Terrell, 1983). While more schools started using SI in their classrooms, more uniformity was needed for planning and implementing SI for ELLs (Short, 2000). The SIOP is a framework for planning, implementing, and assessing instructional practices to help ELLs learn academic language and content simultaneously. The SIOP helps to ensure that the SI strategies are being consistently implemented in general education classrooms (Echevarría et al., 2016). The SIOP model contains eight components: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and review/assessment (Echevarría et al., 2016).

**Lesson Preparation.** The lesson preparation component requires detailed lesson plans that contain content and language objectives. Content objectives should reflect

content standards and learning outcomes. Because they require ELLs to demonstrate knowledge of content using speaking, reading, and writing, language objectives correspond with content objectives and support academic language development (Echevarría et al., 2016).

**Building Background.** Building background requires teachers to link new information to students' backgrounds and experiences and present new information in a way that helps ELLs understand the information. Academic vocabulary should be taught within this component (Echevarría et al., 2016). There is a strong relationship between the acquisition of academic vocabulary and reading comprehension. Academic vocabulary found in many content-specific complex texts can help ELLs understand the texts and improve content knowledge (Ibrahim et al., 2016).

**Comprehensible Input.** Comprehensible input requires the use of various instructional techniques to make the content clear for ELLs. Teachers must use body language, provide visual support, explain content clearly, and adjust their speech based on ELLs' language proficiency levels (Echevarría et al., 2016).

**Strategies.** Strategies emphasize the importance of using cognitive, metacognitive, and language learning strategies to enhance comprehension of content and retention of information. Examples of such strategies are think aloud, identifying key vocabulary, predicting and inferring, breaking words into parts, and paraphrasing (Echevarría et al., 2016).

**Interaction.** Interaction highlights the importance of student interactions during lessons. ELLs must have opportunities for meaningful interaction to demonstrate what

they have learned (Gupta, 2019). Teachers must create multiple opportunities for ELLs to practice academic language through collaborative discussions (Echevarría et al., 2016). Interactions promote critical thinking skills and help construct new understanding (Fisher & Frey, 2016). Direct instruction must be delivered in short increments, followed by student collaborative discussions, to allow ELLs to process new learning (Echevarría et al., 2016).

**Practice and Application.** In practice and application, teachers provide ELLs opportunities to practice new material. Practice and application are essential for the development of academic language. Teachers must be very thoughtful when choosing the activities for this stage (Echevarría et al., 2016). For example, when a class includes ELLs with different language proficiency levels, teachers must create differentiated student tasks that meet student learning needs based on their academic language abilities (Aljaser, 2019; Echevarría et al., 2016).

**Lesson Delivery.** Lesson delivery ensures that classroom instruction aligns with content and language lesson objectives. Teachers must carefully plan and implement strategies for direct instruction, followed by opportunities for students to practice and make progress in meeting content and language lesson objectives (Echevarría et al., 2016).

**Review and Assessment.** Review and assessment emphasizes the importance of ongoing assessments. Student learning should be assessed in multiple ways on an ongoing basis (Gupta, 2019). Teachers should use formative and summative assessments to measure student progress towards planned lesson outcomes. Ongoing informal and

formal assessments should be used throughout each lesson to review key vocabulary and content concepts and to provide students with regular feedback about their learning (Echevarría et al., 2016; Gupta, 2019).

When using the SIOP model with ELLs, explicit academic language instruction during content lessons is essential (Echevarria, 2012). Academic language is the means for ELLs to make meaning of content in each discipline because it involves knowledge of higher-order academic vocabulary that is content-specific (Cummins, 1979; Gupta, 2019; Ramos, 2017). Researchers have emphasized the importance of developing and implementing effective academic language instruction that focuses on building ELLs' academic vocabulary proficiency in all subject areas (Gupta, 2019; Harman & Woods, 2018; Ramos, 2017). To support ELLs' academic growth and to help them make sense of new learning, elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies must know how to provide effective academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs across all content areas (Page & Smith, 2018; Wissink & Stark, 2019).

**Academic Vocabulary Instruction**

Academic vocabulary includes words and phrases that are widely used in academic disciplines (Harman & Wood, 2018). There is a direct connection between academic vocabulary and content knowledge (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Robb, 2016). Ibrahim et al. (2016) pointed out that knowledge of academic vocabulary helps ELLs comprehend discipline-specific complex texts and improves their literacy skills. By acquiring literacy skills, ELLs will most likely improve their performance in the classroom and on literacy

assessments, as academic vocabulary is the key component of reading comprehension across all content areas (Harman & Wood, 2018). When ELLs lack a command of language conventions, they still might be able to communicate if they have academic vocabulary knowledge. However, if their knowledge of essential academic vocabulary words is limited, oral and written communication can be challenging for ELLs (Gibson, 2016). Limited knowledge of academic vocabulary prevents ELLs from understanding content-specific complex texts and negatively affects reading comprehension (Harman & Wood, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2016).

### *Academic Vocabulary Instruction and Reading Comprehension*

The main goal of academic vocabulary instruction is to improve reading comprehension for ELLs across all content areas (Harman & Wood, 2018). To comprehend complex texts, ELLs must be able to identify academic vocabulary words in a given text and understand the words' meanings at the same time (Ibrahim et al., 2016). Frontloading of academic vocabulary before reading can help ELLs understand content-specific texts and feel more confident during whole group discussions (Haager & Osipova, 2017). Frontloading involves explicit teaching of vocabulary words essential for the comprehension of content-specific complex text. Through explicit vocabulary instruction, ELLs have opportunities to interact with new academic vocabulary words multiple times. Multiple exposure and repeated contact with new words allow ELLs to learn and understand the required academic vocabulary. The introduction of selected academic vocabulary words and their definitions during explicit vocabulary instruction is an important initial step (Harman & Wood, 2018). General education teachers, however,

must use more research-based strategies for academic language instruction to help ELLs internalize words' meanings (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Haager & Osipova, 2017). Some of such research-based strategies include providing student-friendly definitions of new words; using illustrations, synonyms, and antonyms; and providing examples and non-examples of using new words in various contexts.

Making academic vocabulary learning for ELLs meaningful and engaging is critical (Gupta, 2019). When ELLs are interested in learning new academic vocabulary words, they take ownership of their learning and start understanding the benefits of learning new academic vocabulary (Reed et al., 2016). Harman and Wood (2018) argued that when general education teachers implement well-designed academic vocabulary instruction, it helps ELLs improve their knowledge of vocabulary, which consequently leads to having better reading comprehension skills. Well-designed academic vocabulary instruction should include student activities that provide ELLs opportunities to understand the meanings of new academic vocabulary words and to practice using them in different contexts (Haager & Osipova 2018). General education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies should thoughtfully select academic vocabulary words they intend to teach. The selected words should be part of content-specific texts ELLs will be required to read and comprehend (Gallagher & Anderson, 2016). ELLs should have multiple opportunities to practice new academic vocabulary words during speaking, reading, and writing (Ibrahim, et al., 2016)

### *Selecting Words for Academic Vocabulary Instruction*

Academic vocabulary includes words and phrases that are widely used in academic disciplines (Harman & Wood, 2018). The selection of focused academic vocabulary is essential for effective instruction. Echevarría et al. (2016) recommended that teachers consider each of the following three groups of academic vocabulary when planning for vocabulary instruction.

- Content vocabulary that is inclusive of key terms specific for the topic being taught.
- General academic vocabulary that is used across academic disciplines, which includes cross-curricular terms, such as *measure, result,* and *conclusion,* and words that express language functions, such as *discuss, argue, describe,* and *summarize.*
- Word parts (roots and affixes), which includes word parts that help ELLs to learn new vocabulary words. For example, learning the meaning of the root *photo-* (light) can help ELLs understand how words *photosynthesis, photocopy,* and *photograph* relate to each other by having the same root. (Echevarria et al., 2016)

Gupta (2019) suggested adding cognates to the academic vocabulary selection list. Cognates are English words that look and mean the same as words in the ELL's home language. Their pronunciation is similar in both languages. For instance, the word *gratitude* in English has the same meaning as the word *gratitud* in Spanish. Cognates help ELLs understand unknown words when they see them in content-specific texts

(Gupta, 2019). General education teachers must consider research-based approaches for selecting academic vocabulary. Instructional strategies for teaching selected academic vocabulary and ongoing assessments of student learning should be part of daily lesson plans (Echevarría et al., 2016).

### *Planning for Academic Vocabulary Instruction*

The quality of lesson planning directly affects classroom instruction (Sahin-Taskin, 2017). General education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies must consider various factors when planning for academic vocabulary instruction. Echevarria et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of planning for student activities that help them understand new academic vocabulary words and various ways to learn them. Some examples of such activities include semantic mapping, four corners vocabulary charts, and word definition maps (Echevarria et al., 2016). Harman and Wood (2018) highlighted the importance of including simple definitions for new academic vocabulary words and multiple ways to learn new words through repetition. Gupta (2019) recommended adding word walls as a strategy for academic vocabulary instruction. Word walls provide visual support for ELLs during learning of new academic vocabulary and "interactive, ongoing displays of words and parts of words that are used to teach concepts, spelling, reading and writing skills" (Gupta, 2019, p. 53). Teachers can plan to add new words to the word walls as they introduce new academic concepts in language arts, math, social studies, and science. Echevarria et al. (2016) agreed with Gupta (2019) and added that word walls help create a productive language environment and draw ELLs' attention to new academic vocabulary. Fisher and Frey (2014) emphasized the

importance of using context clues. They asserted that general education teachers need to model to ELLs how to use context clues. Context clues are found around a new word and help understand its meaning. In addition, ELLs need to have opportunities to practice using new vocabulary words during interactions with their classmates, as interactions enhance student engagement and allow students to apply what they have learned (Gupta, 2019).

Among other academic vocabulary instructional strategies that general education teachers can use in all academic areas are vocabulary journals and vocabulary games. ELLs can use vocabulary journals to record new academic vocabulary words and their definitions. They can also write a sentence using a new word and add a picture to help them remember the word's meaning. ELLs can be assigned new words every week and add them to their journals (Gupta, 2019). Vocabulary games provide opportunities for using new academic vocabulary words in conversations. ELLs can be placed in small groups and practice asking and answering questions using new academic vocabulary. Depending on students' levels of English, teachers can plan questions in advance or ask ELLs to construct their own questions (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

Planning for academic vocabulary instruction can be complex (Harman and Wood, 2018). General education teachers must consider ELLs' language proficiency levels and content standards for language arts, math, social studies, and science when planning for academic vocabulary instruction and assessments. There is a plethora of academic vocabulary instructional strategies offered by various researchers. Despite differences in preferences for choosing strategies for academic vocabulary instruction, all

researchers agree that academic vocabulary should be taught in context and not in isolation, which means that new academic vocabulary should be part of content-specific texts that ELLs are required to read and comprehend (Echevarria et al., 2016; Fisher & Frey, 2014; Gupta, 2019; Harman & Wood, 2018).

### *Assessment of Academic Vocabulary Instruction*

General education teachers must plan for ongoing assessments of academic vocabulary instruction throughout each lesson. The assessments should be used to review key academic vocabulary and to provide students with regular feedback about their learning (Echevarria et al., 2016; Gupta, 2019). Alignment between assessments and instruction is essential for accurate measurement of student academic performance. (Abrams et al., 2016). Researchers distinguish between assessments and evaluations. Assessments are used to gather information about student learning, while evaluations are used to judge student learning. The two most common assessment types used by general education teachers in all content areas are informal assessments and formal assessments (Abrams et al., 2016).

Informal assessments are ongoing opportunities to measure the progress of student learning. They are a quick and easy way to find out what students understand well and what creates problem for their understanding (Hagar, 2019). General education teachers can use observations, student conversations, anecdotal notes, and individual conferences with students as opportunities for informal assessments. Formal assessments can be summative (to measure student progress over time) and formative (to determine a beginning point). Formal assessments help to identify trends in student academic

performance (Echevarria et al., 2016). Formal assessments are generally used by school districts to compare student academic performance by subgroups. General education teachers can help ELLs improve performance on formal standardized assessments by incorporating academic vocabulary instruction into teaching language arts, math, science, and social studies. Particular attention should be given to academic vocabulary words that are used across all content areas. These types of words include cross-curricular vocabulary and words that express processes and functions (for example, discuss, classify, debate, explain, determine, or identify). Knowledge of these academic vocabulary words helps ELLs with understanding questions on standardized tests and can improve their performance on state standardized assessments (Echevarria et al., 2016). It is critical that general education teachers who teach language arts, math, social studies, and science feel prepared to provide effective academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs across all content areas (Page & Smith, 2018; Wissink & Stark, 2019).

## Summary and Conclusions

Effective academic language instruction is essential for ELLs' academic success and for closing the achievement gap between ELLs and their English-speaking peers. To prepare general education teachers for effective academic language instruction, teacher preparation programs include courses for teaching academic language to ELLs. School districts have been implementing professional development to support general education with research-based strategies for academic language instruction across all academic disciplines.

When examining the effectiveness of academic language instruction for ELLs in general education classrooms, the voice of the public education teacher is missing. Teacher buy-in is important when implementing instructional programs. Often, general education teachers do not have opportunities to provide their views and opinions about instructional approaches they are required to implement. There is a shortage of literature on elementary general education teachers' views on implementing effective academic language instruction for ELLs. The existing literature on teachers' views of literacy and language instruction for ELLs did not present empirical value. The need for supplemental research is evident due to the identified gap in the literature.

Data received from the interviews with elementary general education teachers during this qualitative case study were considered as other forms of data. The data are valuable because they can be used to utilize different resources to improve instructional approaches for teaching ELLs. General education teachers' feedback about implementing academic language instruction for ELLs helps to ensure that academic language instruction is not only implemented with fidelity but also with the understanding to encourage the effectiveness and reliability of implemented academic language instruction through teacher buy-in. The detailed information concerning data collection instruments, research methods, design, rationale, and the researcher's role is provided in Chapter 3 of this qualitative case study.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' instruction of academic language for ELLs. It was achieved by conducting individual, semistructured interviews with elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies. This chapter contains an overview of the utilized qualitative approach, the manner in which the study was carried out, the description of the participants, data collection, and data analysis procedures**.**

## Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore elementary general education teachers' experiences implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. During this qualitative case study I attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?

RQ2. How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content?

RQ3. How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition?

Because of the nature of the research questions, I used qualitative research framework to conduct this study. Researchers use qualitative research to gather in-depth insights into the topics that are not well understood (Golafshani, 2003; Johnson et al., 2020). Qualitative researchers explore individuals' experiences in specific real-life

settings to reach research findings that come naturally from real-world situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Golafshani, 2003)

Quantitative research, on the other hand, is used to test or confirm existing theories or assumptions and involves a large number of participants. Quantitative researchers focus on the facets of individuals' behaviors that can be quantified and patterned instead of just exploring them and interpreting their meaning (Rahman, 2017). The qualitative research method was best suited for this research because it had the potential to offer in-depth information about the topic of the study while using a small number of participants.

Researchers use quantitative methods when they investigate relationships between the variables within the phenomenon of the study based on numerical and statistical data. Quantitative research usually includes a large number of participants and utilizes structured interviews with a predetermined set of close-ended questions for the data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The quantitative research method was not best suited for this study because quantitative researchers focus on statistical measurements using polls and surveys with close-ended questions. Predetermined close-ended questions leave no room to probe for answers to gain more in-depth insights about the phenomenon of the research (Rahman, 2017).

Mixed methods research requires researchers to use a combination of elements from qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Miles et al., 2014). Mixed methods research tends to be time-consuming and challenging to manage, especially if qualitative and quantitative methods are carried out simultaneously (Almalki, 2017;

Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). According to Miles et al. (2014), when analyzing quantitative data qualitatively, interpreting conflicting results can be difficult; therefore, mixed methods research was not best suited for this research study. For instance, participants may rate a strategy highly on a numerical scale, but have negative opinions about the same strategy when probed further during an individual interview. I did not choose the mixed method approach because there was no need to collect quantitative data based on focus of this study.

**Justification for Using a Case Study Design**

I selected case study as the most suitable design for this qualitative study. According to Yin (2013), case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon [the case] in-depth and within its real-world context" (p. 16). Yin posited that a case study is the best strategy to answer how and why questions when the relationships between the phenomenon and the context are unclear and when a researcher does not have much control over the existing situation. Qualitative researchers use case studies to gain more in-depth insight into individual's real-life experiences and situations, as they pursue the research problem (Zucker, 2009).

Case studies are best conducted using a qualitative approach. The primary purpose of case studies is to explore the research phenomenon and gain deeper insights into an individual's experiences in real-life situations, which is consistent with the qualitative research approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Zucker, 2009). Using a qualitative case study design allowed me to explore general education teachers' use of instructional strategies for teaching academic language to ELLs and to gain a deeper

understating of their experiences implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. According to Yin (2013), case study is the best strategy to answer how and why questions when the relationships between the phenomenon and the context are unclear. Hence, using a case study approach helped me to answer the study research questions:

RQ1. How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?

RQ2. How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content?

RQ3. How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition?

**Rationale for Not Selecting Other Qualitative Research Design**

I did not select other qualitative research designs for this study because they were not best suited to answer the research questions. I did not select the grounded theory design for this study, because according to Ravitch and Carl (2016), grounded theory research aims to establish a theory by gathering continual data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The purpose of a case study, however, is to explore a problem and find new themes that emerge through data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 2009). Though the grounded theory design includes separating data into themes, I did not seek to create a theory during this study.

I did not use narrative research design because researchers use narrative research approach to convey life stories through narrative analysis and to examine history (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In addition, narrative research can be difficult to

qualitatively assess in an objective manner due to its personal and subjective nature (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These reasons make the narrative approach not best suited for this study.

I did not choose ethnography research because it focuses on experiences and ways of life based on culture (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Data analysis for ethnography research can be a lengthy process due to the time needed to write and analyze the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In addition, during this study I did not seek to explain sociocultural aspects, therefore ethnography research was not best suited for this study.

I did not select the phenomenology approach because this study's purpose was to explore various participants' experiences with implementing academic language instruction. When researchers use the phenomenology approach they seek to find the difference in participants' interpretations of the same experience (Lodico et al., 2010). A case study approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of an individual's real-life experiences, while exploring the phenomenon of research (Zucker, 2009). Using a case study approach, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of general education teachers' experiences implementing academic language instruction for ELLs, while exploring their views and opinions about teaching academic language to ELLs.

## Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this qualitative case study, my goal was to collect and examine data that were qualitative in nature. I utilized a preinterview questionnaire and individual semistructured interviews for data collection. As a researcher, I only functioned as an interviewer and was not directly involved in implementing academic

language instruction for ELLs in general education classroom settings. I did not have any supervisory oversight over the study participants. I was careful in maintaining my predispositions during the study. I had to be aware of my biases and assumptions about academic language instruction and ensure they did not interfere with the data collection and data analysis process.

## Methodology

I gathered and examined the data about the views and opinions of elementary general education teachers about implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. I explored those opinions using a preinterview questionnaire and individual, semistructured interviews with 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science and social studies.

### Participant Selection

Participants for this qualitative case study were 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies at linguistically and culturally diverse elementary schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. All selected participants were familiar with instructional strategies for teaching academic language to ELLs. Ravitch and Carl (2016) affirmed that qualitative research focuses on a small sample population size to obtain detailed information from the participants. The sample size of 10 participants was suitable for this qualitative case study. All selected participants were general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science and social studied and are familiar with instructional strategies for teaching academic

language to ELLs. I identified and recruited the study participants by using a snowball sampling recruitment strategy.

Smaller sample sizes are sufficient to collect rich, detailed data when using purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). Boyd (2001) asserted that two to 10 participants are enough to reach data saturation in qualitative research. Therefore, I selected 10 participants using purposeful snowball sampling, which was a suitable sample size for this qualitative case study. Snowball sampling is a purposeful sampling method used for collecting data during qualitative research with samples of target population that are not easily accessible (Naderifar et al., 2017). Purposeful sampling is a characteristic of qualitative research. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), "Purposeful sampling, which is sometimes referred to as purpose sampling, is the primary sampling method employed in qualitative research" (p. 128). Merriam (2009) pointed out that when researchers intend to gain deeper understanding and insights, they must purposefully select a sample they can learn from. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' experiences implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. Therefore, I chose a purposeful sampling strategy for identifying and recruiting the study participants . Furthermore, the purposeful selection of teacher participants allowed me to gather detailed information to answer this qualitative case study's research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?

RQ2: How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content?

RQ3: How do teachers plan assessments for supporting ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition?

The population for this qualitative case study included 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies. All teachers were selected based on their willingness to participate and were solicited using personal conversations. Participation was voluntary. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of responses, I assigned pseudonyms to all participants of this qualitative case study.

**Instrumentation**

Instruments for data collection in this qualitative case study included a pre-interview questionnaire and teacher interview questions. It was my responsibility to ensure that the selected instruments were valid and reliable and aligned to the research questions that this qualitative case study aimed to answer. Validity refers to accuracy of the research findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure that the questions for the preinterview questionnaire and individual interviews were designed to provide the most accurate data for the study, I asked three education experts who work with ELLs and general education teachers to review and approve the questions prior to using them for data collection.

I thoughtfully implemented all procedures for collecting data to ensure that they returned the expected results. I emailed the pre interview questionnaire to each study

participant 7 days prior to individual interviews. Each study participant had 3 days to respond to the pre-interview questionnaire, share initial thoughts about implementing academic language instruction for ELLs and return it to me via email. I utilized the data from the preinterview questionnaire to tailor the interview questions to get more in-depth information about participants' experiences with teaching academic language to ELLs. I conducted all interviews via Zoom. Lo Iacono et al. (2016) emphasized that virtual interview methods can be beneficial to participants in a convenient location away from workspaces. The virtual interview settings were quiet, and there were no interruptions during each interview. During interviews, I listened carefully and reflectively to each participant and wrote notes on the interview protocol to capture important aspects of each interview.

***Preinterview Questionnaire***

I used preinterview questionnaire as a professional courtesy before individual teacher interviews to give the study participants an opportunity to share initial thoughts about implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. I utilized the information from the preinterview questionnaire to tailor the interview questions to get more in-depth information about the research topic. During individual interviews, I asked the study participants to elaborate on their answers to the questions in the provided preinterview questionnaire. Completing the preinterview questionnaire prior to the interviews prepared the participants to provide detailed information about their experiences implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. My responsibility was to send the preinterview questionnaire via email to the participants in a timely manner and to review the data from

their answers in preparation for the interviews. I utilized the reviewed data to tailor individual teacher interview questions to get more in-depth information about the research topic.

### *Teacher Interviews*

Interviews provide detailed information about participants' viewpoints and experiences pertaining to the study phenomenon (Turner, 2010). In this qualitative case study, I conducted individual interviews with 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, social studies, and science in culturally and linguistically diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. I used McNamara's (2009) and Turner's (2010) guidelines for conducting qualitative interviews. Based on the eight principals for conducting qualitative interviews outlined by McNamara, I used the following procedures: (a) I used a private interview setting, (b) I explained the purpose of the interview, (c) I communicated confidentiality terms, (d) I explained the interview format, (e) I shared the length of the interview, (f) I provided contact information, (g) I gave the participant the opportunity for questions, and (h) I took written notes to recall answers.

I used Cummins' (1979) theory of second language acquisition, research on teaching academic language to ELLs, and World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (World Class Instructional Design and Assessment [WIDA], 2012) English language development (ELD) standards to craft the questions for the preinterview questionnaire and for individual teacher interviews. The questions for the preinterview questionnaire and for teacher interviews were reviewed and approved by three education

experts who work with elementary general education teachers to support academic language instruction for ELLs.

The WIDA Consortium is a group of 39 states dedicated to the design and implementation of rigorous and equitable educational opportunities for ELLs. The WIDA (2012) ELD standards serve as a resource for planning and implementing academic language instruction and assessment for ELLs in language arts, math, social studies, and science. The WIDA ELD standards work along with content standards to ensure that ELLs learn content and academic language simultaneously. There are five WIDA ELD standards that provide connection between academic content and language development for ELLs.

- Standard 1 – Social and Instructional Language. English language learners communicate for social and instructional purposes within the school setting.
- Standard 2 – Language of Language Arts. English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of language arts.
- Standard 3 – Language of Mathematics. English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of mathematics.
- Standard 4 – Language of Science. English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of science.

- Standard 5 – Language of Social Studies. English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of social studies. (WIDA, 2012)

WIDA (2012) ELD Standards 2, 3, and 4 require ELLs to understand content and communicate learned information in language arts, math, social studies and science. Academic language is the means for ELLs to make meaning of content in each academic discipline because it involves knowledge of higher-order academic vocabulary that is content-specific (Cummins, 1979; Gupta, 2019; Ramos, 2017). Effective academic vocabulary instruction is essential to support ELLs in meeting WIDA ELD standards, as researchers have shown a direct connection between academic vocabulary and content knowledge (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Robb, 2016). The selected and approved questions for the preinterview questionnaire and individual teacher questionnaire aligned to WIDA ELD Standards 2, 3 and 4. My responsibility as a researcher was to utilize the preinterview questionnaire and conduct individual teacher interviews to collect data for this qualitative case study.

## Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

### *Recruitment*

I first gained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct my research. Once Walden University IRB granted approval, I started recruiting the study participants using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a purposeful sampling method used for collecting data during qualitative research with samples of target population that are not easily accessible (Naderifar et al., 2017). I used

snowball sampling due to hardship caused by COVID 19 to locate the target population for this qualitative case study. All 10 study participants were elementary general education teachers who taught language arts, math, science, and social studies. All potential study participants were from linguistically and culturally diverse public elementary schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. I emailed a letter to each potential study participant, inviting them to participate in the study. All potential study participants expressed interest in participating in the study. Then, I emailed the consent form to each study participant. Once I received formal consent from the participants, I started the data collection process.

### *Participation*

All study participants completed the preinterview questionnaire and participated in individual virtual interviews. In addition, all study participants took part in the virtual member checking during data analysis process. To ensure anonymity and protection of responses, I provided all study participants pseudonyms.

### *Data Collection*

I collected data from 10 different elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math science, and social studies in culturally and linguistically diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. All 10 teachers have had experience teaching academic language to ELLs. Each of these teachers answered the preinterview questionnaire and participated in the individual semistructured interview. I sent the preinterview questionnaire to each study participant, who then returned it to me via email. I conducted and recorded the individual

semistructured interviews using Zoom. I transcribed the interview audio recordings using Temi transcription software. I confirmed the accuracy of the interview transcripts by using playback. After the interviews, I emailed each participant to thank them for taking time from their busy schedules to complete the preinterview questionnaire and participate in the interviews. As for debriefing, I checked back by using virtual member checking. Each study participant had an opportunity to provide feedback about the accuracy of my interpretations of the collected data.

**Data Analysis Plan**

I used manual content analysis to analyze the collected data. I made sure that the collected data helped to answer the study research questions: RQ1: How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs? RQ2: How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content? RQ3: How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition? The initial phase of the data analysis process included a review of the participants' responses to the preinterview questionnaire. I took notes on the things that I noticed to tailor the interview questions and to ask probing questions, if needed during the interviews. The notes that I took helped to collect rich detailed data to support answers to this study's research questions, because as Merriam and Tisdell (2015) put forth, the process of note taking allows the researcher to develop tentative ideas about relationships. For example, if study participants indicated in the preinterview questionnaire that they used multiple strategies to teach academic language to ELLs, I

took notes on the information. I included this information in the interview questions and asked the study participants about how they selected instructional strategies for academic language development and academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs. By doing that, I was able to collect detailed data to answer RQ1: How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?

Next, I read and analyzed the interview transcripts. Creswell and Poth (2017) posited that personal experiences can be compared to generalizations, patterns, or themes about the topic. I read and reread the collected data, including the notes that I took during each interview. Reviewing the collected data more than once is necessary during data analysis because it helps with data familiarity and identifying initial patterns (Cleary et al., 2014). Then, I started coding process.

Coding is a process of assigning meaning to data, using words and phrases that explain or describe what is present in the collected data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are three coding strategies used by researchers (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2015). I began the data analysis with the first coding cycle which included preliminary identification of a priori codes followed by open coding. A priori codes are the codes that are developed prior to examining the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I made sure that the identified priori codes aligned with the conceptual framework of this qualitative case study. I then proceeded with open coding. Open coding allows researchers to identify initial codes by summarizing pieces of data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) The coding process was pivotal for analyzing qualitative data. Open coding allowed me

to reduce collected information to a manageable size. I used interview transcripts and questionnaires to identify initial codes. After identifying initial codes by using open coding, I moved to the second coding cycle and used axial coding to continue data analysis. Axial coding is also called thematic clustering or pattern coding. Saldana (2016) put forth that grouping similar codes reduces the number of the selected initial codes and helps to organize them into categories. I used axial coding to identify categories and themes that aligned with each research question of this qualitative case study. I used member checking to ensure that I interpreted the data provided by the participants correctly. Member checking means checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Table 1 includes the research questions for this qualitative case study. Data collection sources, timeframes, and data analysis strategies are specified for each research question. Teacher questionnaires and individual semistructured interviews were used as data collection instruments. Detailed description of the data analysis findings, including codes, categories and themes that emerged will be provided in Chapter 4.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Data Collection Tools*

| Research Question | Data Source | Data Collection Timeframe | Data Analysis |
|---|---|---|---|
| RQ1. How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teach academic vocabulary to ELLs? | Questionnaires<br><br>Individual interviews | Weeks 1 and 2 | Annotating, coding, comparing, categorizing, and manual content analysis |
| RQ2. How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of academic content? | Questionnaires<br><br>Individual interviews | Weeks 3 and 4 | Annotating, coding, comparing, categorizing, and manual content analysis |
| RQ3. How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' learning of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition? | Questionnaires<br><br>Individual interviews | Weeks 1 and 2 | Annotating, coding, comparing, categorizing, and manual content analysis |

**Treatment of Discrepant Cases**

Discrepant cases refer to data that seem to contradict emerging themes during qualitative data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I utilized the process of member checking to develop an accurate reflection of the responses and to identify any discrepant cases. Member checking includes checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). All study participants took part in virtual member checking and had an opportunity to confirm that the collected data were interpreted correctly or to make revisions if

necessary. Based on the results of the member checking there were no discrepant cases discovered during the data collection process.

## Trustworthiness

### Credibility

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) asserted that researchers must do their best to ensure the credibility and reliability of research. A researcher must use reflexivity (thoughtful self-awareness of his/her experiences and reasoning) to minimize or alleviate potential biases (Ravitch, & Carl, 2016). I ensured that my own perceptions about general education teachers' academic language instruction and my assumptions about how academic language should be taught did not interfere with the study. I also utilized member checking to ensure credibility of this qualitative case study. Member checking involves checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). All study participants had an opportunity to confirm that the collected data were interpreted correctly and to make revisions if necessary.

### Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which qualitative research results can be transferred to different settings with other participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used a rich, thick description to establish validity of this qualitative case study. Thick descriptions mean detailed descriptions of data and context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I supplied detailed data description by transcribing the audio recordings of individual teacher interviews.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I utilized member checking to strengthen dependability of the research findings. Member checking supports credibility and dependability and involves checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Another strategy to strengthen dependability is audit trail. Audit trail ensures transparency of the research and involves providing detailed notes on how decisions are made during the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I made sure that I had detailed notes about the process of data collection and data management available for the review.

**Conformability**

Conformability refers to the neutrality of the research findings. Conformability is concerned with confirming that interpretation of the collected data is not based on the researcher's opinions, but solely based on data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I utilized reflexivity and member checking to ensure the conformability of the research findings. Member checking involves checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Reflexivity refers to thoughtful self-awareness of the researcher's experiences and reasoning (Råheim et al., 2016). Using reflexivity helped to alleviate potential biases and ensured the neutrality of the research findings.

## Ethical Procedures

I obtained approval through Walden University's IRB. I gathered signed consent forms from each study participant to ensure that the participants understood that their participation in the study was truly voluntary and that they had the right to opt out at any time. Since this qualitative case study required participants to express their thoughts and feelings openly, I utilized several measures to ensure the participants' anonymity. I excluded participants' names from all reference notes, questionnaires, and interview responses. To guarantee participants' anonymity, I kept the original documents in a private and secure location, where only the researcher and other facilitators could access them. I also provided each study participant with a pseudonym to protect those involved in the research findings. To avoid misrepresentation, I offered participants an opportunity to examine the collected data.

After I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB, I began recruiting study participants by using snowball sampling. I contacted each potential teacher participant via email. I also provided potential participants with written consent forms. I instructed each participant who agreed to participate in this qualitative case study to return the signed consent forms within 3 to 5 days. The consent forms provided explanations of the study purpose, confidentiality, and the use of results for this research. I assigned each participant a pseudonym to ensure their protection. No one was aware of their identities except for me. I saved the data collected from this research to secured cloud storage and a flash drive, which I will keep for a minimum of 5 years in a safe and secure location.

## Summary

In chapter 3 I offered a thorough explanation of this qualitative case study's design, which included the data collection instruments, as well as participant selection and the recruitment selection procedures. Furthermore, I offered a review of the process for the analysis of the collected data and the appropriateness of the research design. I also provided a review of the evidence of trustworthiness and probable ethical considerations. Chapter 4 includes detailed descriptions of data collection and data analysis. It also includes the study results, evidence of trustworthiness, and the summary of answers to the research questions of this qualitative case study.

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of elementary general education teachers' instruction of academic language for ELLs by answering the following three research questions:

RQ1. How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?

RQ2. How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content?

RQ3. How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition?

I achieved the purpose of this qualitative case study by collecting and analyzing data from preinterview questionnaire and individual, semistructured interviews with elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies. Chapter 4 includes a detailed description of data collection, data analysis, study results, evidence of trustworthiness and summary of the study participants' answers to the pre interview questionnaire and individual interview questions.

## Setting

I recruited the participants for this qualitative case study by using a snowball sampling strategy. I created pseudonyms for the anonymity of the participants. My study included 10 elementary teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies in culturally and linguistically diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-

Atlantic area of the United States. The study participants did not experience any conditions that could have influenced the study results.

Participants for this qualitative case study were 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies at culturally and linguistically diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. I utilized snowball sampling as the recruitment strategy to select participants for this study. I invited 10 potential study participants to participate in this study, and all of them agreed to participate. All 10 participants consented, completed the preinterview questionnaire, participated in individual semistructured interviews, and agreed to confirm the accuracy of the collected data via member checking. To ensure anonymity, I assigned each selected participant a pseudonym, as reported in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Participant Identification, Age, and Years Working with ELLs as an Elementary General Education Teacher*

| Participant Pseudonym | Age Group | Years working with ELLs as an elementary general education teacher |
|---|---|---|
| P1 | 40 – 50 | 22 |
| P2 | 20 – 30 | 7 |
| P3 | 30 – 40 | 4 |
| P4 | 20 – 30 | 5 |
| P5 | 20 – 30 | 5 |
| P6 | 40 – 50 | 13 |
| P7 | 20 – 30 | 5 |
| P8 | 40 – 50 | 18 |
| P9 | 30 – 40 | 4 |
| P10 | 30 – 40 | 10 |

## Data Collection

### Number of Participants

I collected data from 10 different elementary teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies in culturally and linguistically diverse elementary public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. All 10 teachers had experience teaching academic language to ELLs. Each teacher answered the preinterview questionnaire and participated in the individual semistructured interview. I emailed the preinterview questionnaire to each study participant, who returned it to me via email. I used Zoom to conduct and record the individual semistructured interviews.

First I received the approval from Walden University's IRB. The approval number was 12-15-20-0741033. Then I started recruiting the study participants using a snowball sampling strategy. All 10 potential study participants were elementary teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies and who had experience teaching academic language to ELLs. I emailed a letter to each potential participant inviting them to participate in the study. All potential participants expressed interest in participating in the study. Then, I emailed the consent form to each participant. Once I received formal consent from the participants, I started the data collection process.

### Data Collection Instruments

I collected data using two data collection instruments: a preinterview questionnaire and individual semistructured interviews, which I conducted virtually via Zoom. Preinterview questionnaire questions, as well as individual semistructured interview questions, appear in Appendix A and Appendix B. I emailed the preinterview

questionnaire as a professional courtesy to each study participant 7 days prior to individual interviews. The preinterview questionnaire allowed the participants to share initial thoughts about implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. Each study participant had 3 days to respond to the preinterview questionnaire and return it to me via email. I utilized the data from the preinterview questionnaire to tailor the interview questions to get more in-depth information about participants' experiences with teaching academic language to ELLs. Upon receiving the completed questionnaire from each participant via email, I emailed the invitations to participate in the interview to all 10 study participants. I included the interview times that they could choose from and the link to the virtual interview platform in the invitation. All participants opted for the Zoom platform. Lo Iacono et al. (2016) emphasized that virtual interview methods can be beneficial to participants in a convenient location away from workspaces. All 10 study participants emailed me chosen interview times that were suitable for them. The virtual interview settings were quiet and there were no interruptions during each interview. I conducted the interviews from December 19, 2020, to December 31, 2020. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. I started each interview with an introduction and an informal conversation to build positive rapport. Building positive rapport with the interviewees is important to their comfort level (Garbarski et al., 2016). During interviews, I listened reflectively to each participant and wrote notes on the interview protocol to capture important aspects of each interview. Reflective listening and note taking help develop tentative ideas about relationships and ensure understanding of participants' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Attentive and reflective listening

helped me to ensure the collection of the accurate data. The data accuracy was confirmed by all study participants by employing virtual member checking. Member checking means checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

**Data Recording**

I collected data from the preinterview questionnaire via email and then recorded the data using Word documents. I collected and recorded data from individual semistructured interviews using Zoom and then transcribed using Temi transcription software. After using the software to transcribe the audio, I exported the transcripts to word documents. I confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts by comparing them with the recorded interviews using playback. The playback was clear and there were no barriers for confirming the accuracy of the interview transcripts.

All collected data from preinterview questionnaires and individual interviews are stored electronically with a password required for access in a secured location for the next 5 years. All collected data will remain confidential until it is destroyed in 5 years. I am the only person who has access to the collected data.

**Variations from Chapter 3 and Unusual Circumstances**

Only one variation from the original plan for data collection, discussed in Chapter 3, occurred in the data collection process. In the original plan, I would select participants via purposeful sampling from a school in the specific school district in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. Due to the fact that COVID 19 caused hardship to locate and access participants from the intended school district, I used snowball sampling for

participant recruitment. Snowball sampling is a purposeful sampling method used for collecting data during qualitative research with samples of target population that are not easily accessible (Naderifar et al., 2017). Using snowball sampling did not require the study participants to be affiliated with a school in the specific school district in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States, as it was initially planned in Chapter 3. There were no unusual circumstances during the data collection process.

## Data Analysis

As described in Chapter 3, I used manual content analysis to analyze the collected data. I used a preinterview questionnaire and individual semistructured interviews to collect information-rich and meaningful data in this qualitative case study. After I collected, recorded, and checked the data for accuracy, I read several times the preinterview questionnaire responses and the interview transcripts to familiarize myself with the data. Reviewing the collected data more than once is necessary during data analysis because it helps with data familiarity and in identifying initial patterns (Cleary et al., 2014). After rereading and reviewing the collected data several times, I started the coding process. The process of transitioning from codes to categories and themes is displayed in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5. I provided a detailed description of the collected data to support each theme in the results section.

**Table 3**

*Summative Coding RQ1*

| A priori codes (CALP) | Open codes | Categories | Themes | Interview excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academic language acquisition | Explicit instruction realia | Whole group instructional strategies | Teachers select strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs based on student background knowledge.<br><br>Teachers select various strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs based on instructional models they plan to implement. | P8: Modifying activities based on student background |
| | Modeling student discussions | Small group instructional strategies | | P9: Link any new words to their prior knowledge |
| | ELLs' prior knowledge | Background knowledge | | P6: Knowing who your students are |
| | ELLs' language proficiency | | | P3: Use direct instruction to explain the meaning |
| | What they know | | | P8: Center activities include practice to use academic words |
| | | | | P4: I provide sentence frames for small group writing |

**Table 4**

*Summative Coding RQ2*

| A priori codes (CALP) | Open codes | Categories | Themes | Interview excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academic language acquisition | Curriculum content standards<br><br>Lesson plans<br><br>Guide<br><br>Share<br><br>Select new words | Collaborate for planning curriculum and standards as guides<br><br>Shared strategies | Teachers use curriculum and content standards to guide their planning for academic instruction, including choice of academic vocabulary words that they intend to teach.<br><br>Teachers plan collaboratively to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content. | P3: I use the curriculum<br><br>P1: I use words based on the curriculum focus<br><br>P7: I also use standards to plan<br><br>P4: We plan together<br><br>P8: We share plans<br><br>P2: My partner and I meet … and then we plan assessments |

**Table 5**

*Summative Coding RQ3*

| A priori codes (CALP) | Open codes | Categories | Themes | Interview excerpts |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Academic language acquisition | Questioning<br><br>Writing answers to multiple choice realia comprehension questions<br><br>Speak and write<br><br>Plan content vocabulary | Assessing<br><br>Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills<br><br>Formal and informal assessments<br><br>Variety of assessments | Teachers plan for a variety of listening, speaking, reading, and writing assessments to support students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition. | P7: Each written question has a multiple choice<br><br>P9: I assess by having conversations with them<br><br>P4: I can have students type responses, draw and highlight |

Coding is a process of assigning meaning to data using words and phrases that explain or describe what is present in the collected data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Coding is investigative and exploratory and includes initial summarizing of portions of data followed by organizing those summaries into categories and themes (Saldana, 2016). Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are three coding strategies used by researchers (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2015).

I began the data analysis with the first coding cycle that included preliminary identification of a priori codes, followed by open coding. A priori codes are the codes that are developed prior to examining the data (Ravitch & Carl. 2016). The identified priori codes align with the conceptual framework of this qualitative case study. I then proceeded with open coding. Open coding allows researchers to identify initial codes by summarizing pieces of data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Open coding helped me reduce

collected information to a manageable size by coding the collected data from the preinterview questionnaire and the interview transcriptions. As I repeatedly went through each line of data in every questionnaire and interview transcript, I developed initial codes that emerged in the data analysis process. I made sure that I used the research questions as a guide during the coding process because, as Saldana (2016) asserted, the essence of research questions determines the coding choices. After reviewing the frequency and commonalities of the initial codes, I created a table with emergent codes, categories, themes, and interview excerpts. As I reviewed the data repeatedly, I was able to add more codes to the table.

Once all the codes were selected, I moved to the second coding cycle, which includes identifying categories and themes by using axial coding. The purpose of axial coding is "to determine which codes in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones and to reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed, and the best representative codes are selected" (Boeije, 2010, p. 109). I identified the categories by grouping codes that were established during first coding cycle. Saldana (2016) put forth that grouping similar codes reduces the number of the selected initial codes and helps to organize them into categories. For example, all codes related to teaching academic vocabulary to the whole class were placed in the category *whole group instructional strategies*. All codes for teaching academic vocabulary in small groups were placed in the category *small group instructional strategies*. Identifying these categories allowed me to help answer RQ1: How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and

teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs? I continued to identify codes and categories that helped me answer RQ2 and RQ3.

Once I identified the categories, I continued using the axial coding to establish themes. A theme is "an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (Saldana, 2016, p. 199). Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that axial coding helps the researcher see how identified categories can be grouped into themes. I merged the categories to create themes that conceptualize the findings of this qualitative case study. For example, I started with the category *whole group instructional strategies* and then was able to merge it further with the category *small group instructional strategies*. I then created the theme *teachers select various strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs based on instructional models they plan to implement*. I merged categories based on their relation to each other. For example, I merged *whole group instructional strategies* and *small group strategies* because they both were covered by the study participants when they talked about selecting strategies for academic language development and academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs.

Reviewing the collected data multiple times to identify categories and themes helped me reach the data saturation. Reaching data saturation is one of the goals of axial coding (Saldana, 2016). Data saturation is reached "when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions or consequences are seen in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). As I refined the themes further, I followed Saldana's (2016) guidance. Saldana

(2016) suggested reducing the number of themes to a smaller number. I was able to identify five themes. The themes were applied to building the findings of this qualitative case study by aligning each theme to the corresponding research question. Then, I organized the themes based on their alignment with the research questions. Further description of the identified themes and their alignment with the research questions is provided in the results section.

### Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases refer to data that seem to contradict emerging themes during qualitative data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I utilized the process of member checking to develop an accurate reflection of the responses and to identify any discrepant cases. There were no discrepant cases discovered during the data collection process.

## Results

### Results Relative to RQ1

RQ1: How do teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?

The analysis of the data related to the first research question revealed two themes. All study participants confirmed that they select a variety of strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs. ELLs' background knowledge and instructional delivery models guide the selection of the strategies. There were no cases of nonconforming data related to RQ1.

#### *Theme 1: Teachers Select Strategies for Academic Language Development and Teaching Academic Vocabulary to ELLs Based on Student Background Knowledge*

All 10 study participants emphasized that having background knowledge about ELLs is important when planning for academic vocabulary instruction and academic language development. Eight study participants mentioned English language proficiency levels, ELLs' prior knowledge of the content, and their learning styles as important factors that contribute to ELLs' background knowledge. P8 stated,

> Modifying classroom activities based on students' language levels and background is very effective…. During parent conferences, I ask parents what activities their students enjoy, what learning styles they have, how much time they devote to the study of the subject area.

P9 shared, "Most of my ELLs speak Spanish. I always try to plan to link any new words and concepts that we are learning to their prior knowledge. I always try to incorporate a lot of visuals into my instruction." P10 further noted, "There are certain words and certain things consistently misinterpreted by ELLs. I pick those words and plan to reteach them using strategies that connect to student background knowledge like visuals, pictures, videos." P1 detailed:

> Sometimes when we talk about the story and I see that the question is hard for my lower ELL students, I plan to use probing questions, gestures, movements so that they can understand…. It all depends on how many newcomers I have in my class and the levels of students in my class.

P4 acknowledged, "I base it off given content, what students already learned and their prior knowledge." P3 stated, "I always try to look at the language levels of my ELL students." P2 noted, "When planning my lessons throughout the unit and choosing

strategies, I make sure the academic vocabulary is scaffolded in a way in which students can build off their prior knowledge to understand new vocabulary." P6 concurred,

> Academic vocabulary instruction includes knowing who your students are and how much they know about the language. I try to use scaffolding for my lower ELL students, teach them new words, so they will be able to explain using academic language what we studied in class.

Thus, using ELLs' background was perceived as one way of how teachers select instructional strategies for academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs.

This aligns with previous research and the conceptual framework concept of CALP. To ensure ELLs' academic success, teachers must understand their linguistic needs and provide rich and meaningful instruction that supports ELLs' academic language growth (Cummins, 2009). Academic vocabulary instruction should be an essential component of academic language instruction. Knowledge of words and phrases that are widely used in academic disciplines supports academic language proficiency and improves ELLs' ability to construct meaning from a variety of complex texts (Echevarria et al., 2016).

### *Theme 2: Teachers Select Various Strategies for Academic Language Development and Teaching Academic Vocabulary to ELLs Based on Instructional Models They Plan to Implement*

All study participants reported that they plan to implement various strategies for academic language development and academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs during

direct instruction and small group instruction. All 10 teachers reported using modeling: visuals, pictures, body language, vocabulary review, word walls, realia, and pair-share to teach academic vocabulary to ELLs. Seven teachers reported using explicit vocabulary instruction, and three teachers reported using sentence frames and sentence starters. All teachers shared that when they select instructional strategies, they first decide if they will use them during whole group instruction or small group instruction. For example, frontloading vocabulary, explicit vocabulary instruction, modeling, using visuals, and using body language were the strategies that are most frequently used by the study participants for whole group instruction.

P3 stated, "I use direct instruction to explain the meaning of the new words, modeling them, using them in a sentence and acting out these words." P8 noted, "I include new words in word walls or highlight them on anchor charts that students can refer to anytime." P2 replied, "I make sure to explicitly instruct the words during the whole group using pictures, so students are exposed to the visual representation." P7 and P10 emphasized the importance of frontloading new vocabulary words during whole group instruction. P7 stated: "When planning for whole group instruction I'll go through each of the words. I try frontload academic vocabulary as much as I can before we read the text." P10 concurred, "I incorporate academic language into my lessons through frontloading vocabulary." P4 and P10 stressed the importance of explicit direct vocabulary instruction during whole group and then reviewing it throughout the lesson. P4 stated,

> I explicitly teach the word, students learn what the word means and how to use it in a sentence. I also have various reference charts with academic vocabulary on the walls as we learn the words and what they mean.

P10 explained, "I incorporate academic language into my lessons through frontloading vocabulary, including it around the classroom (word walls) and reviewing it throughout the lesson." Sentence frames, pair-share, using words in sentences, using realia, and student discussions were the most common strategies used by study participants to plan small group instruction. Pair-share, using realia, student discussions and sentence frames are some of the strategies that teachers select for small group instruction. P3 shared, "I usually ask them to pair up and use words in sentences, so speaking, listening to others, using words in sentences could enhance their understanding of the vocabulary words." P4 and P8 shared that they use sentence frames during small group writing activities. P4 stated, "I also provide sentence frames and sentence starters especially during writing activities. Sentence frames and sentence started are good for scaffolding because they boost confidence." P8 further detailed, "I include words that I want to them to use in sentence frames, which students will use in their written explanations." P7 stressed effectiveness of using student discussions by stating, "The most effective strategy is when students are talking to each other using the word. I usually plan discussion questions about the word they will use when talking to each other." P9 shared about using realia and hands-on activities, "I plan to give students more hands-on opportunities during small groups using realia, for example, toothpicks, marshmallows to build 3d shapes to identify their attributes." This indicates that teachers select academic language

development and academic vocabulary instruction strategies based on the instructional delivery model that they plan to implement.

This theme aligns with previous research included in the literature review section. Echevarria et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of planning for student activities that help them understand new academic vocabulary words and various ways to learn them. Gupta (2019) added that ELLs need to have opportunities to practice using new vocabulary words in various ways during interactions with their classmates. It also aligns with the conceptual framework concept of CALP. CALP requires ELLs to have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content (Cummins, 2009; Thomas & Collier, 2010). CALP refers to the student's formal academic learning and deals with skills essential to academics, such as listening, reading, speaking, and how to write about the relevant subject matter. Landing these language skills is a crucial concept when it comes to a student's academic success. Selecting and implementing a variety of whole group and small group instructional strategies for academic vocabulary instruction not only supports ELLs' acquisition of academic vocabulary, but also improves their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

**Result Findings Relative to RQ2**

RQ2: How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content?

The analysis of the data related to RQ2 revealed two themes. All study participants reported that they collaborate with colleagues during planning for academic vocabulary instruction. All study participants use curriculum and content standards to

guide planning for incorporating the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content. There were no discrepant cases pertaining to this research question.

### *Theme 3: Teachers Use Curriculum and Content Standards to Guide Their Planning for Academic Vocabulary Instruction, Including the Choice of Academic Vocabulary Words They Intend to Teach*

Under this theme, the study participants shared that they plan intentionally for academic language instruction and use more than one resource to guide their planning. This aligns with some findings from the literature review. Harman and Wood (2018) and Sahin-Taskin (2107) stated that planning for academic vocabulary instruction can be complex, and the quality of lesson planning directly affects classroom instruction Echevarria et al. (2016) agreed with that statement and further emphasized the importance of planning for student activities that help them understand new academic vocabulary words.

All 10 study participants reported that they use the curriculum to guide their planning for academic vocabulary instruction, including the choice of academic vocabulary words they intend to teach. P3 stated, “I use the curriculum that I follow.” P4 detailed, “I base my planning off the curriculum that my district requires us to teach.” P10 stressed, “I plan and choose words based on the curriculum focus.” P7 acknowledged, “The academic vocabulary that I teach is chosen for me by the district language arts and social studies curriculum.” P8 stated, “When I plan, I look at the words identified by the curriculum.” P9 shared, “I go based on what curriculum requires.”

In addition to using curriculum as a guide for planning, five study participants reported that they also use content standards when they plan. P7 stated, “I also use standards when I plan.” P2 shared, “The instruction that standards-based lends itself to everything.” P6 detailed, “I plan for teaching academic vocabulary that is chosen based on content standards.” P4 detailed, “I am choosing the words that are tied to standards.” P9 acknowledged, “I focus on what the standard requires first.” This indicates that teachers plan using curriculum and content standards.

This theme aligns with the previous research and findings from the literature review that emphasize importance of incorporating instruction of academic vocabulary into content instruction. Echevarria (2012) asserted that explicit academic language instruction during content lessons is essential. Academic language is the means for ELLs to make meaning of content in each discipline because it involves knowledge of higher-order academic vocabulary that is content-specific (Cummins, 1979; Gupta, 2019; Ramos, 2017). Fisher and Frey (2014), Robb (2016), and Ibrahim et al. (2016) put forth that there is a direct connection between academic vocabulary and content because knowledge of a content-specific vocabulary helps ELLs comprehend discipline-specific complex texts and improves their literacy skills. The theme also aligns with the conceptual framework concept of CALP because, as Cummins (1979) asserted, CALP involves the use of higher-level vocabulary and more advanced sentence structure and requires ELLs to have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content.

### *Theme 4: Teachers Plan Collaboratively to Incorporate the Teaching of Academic Vocabulary into the Teaching of the Academic Content*

Under this theme, all study participants reported that they collaborate with their colleagues when planning for implementing academic vocabulary instruction during content instruction. Teachers shared that they collaborate with their grade-level teaching partners. Such collaboration includes discussing academic vocabulary that needs to be taught, strategies and assessments that teachers intend to incorporate during content lessons, and sharing lesson plans. P8 stated, "My partner and I, we have our planning time. We share effective strategies that work with our ELL students and how to be able to help our students." P4 noted, "We do share out our plans." P2 explained, "When we are looking at the lesson, we talk about what our kids might struggle with, so we are able to kind of back map to make sure they know those foundational skills. And then we plan our assessments." P9 detailed, "So we share ideas. We look at lesson plans together. We share lesson plans, we share ideas, we share strategies and methods." P7 stated, "I share with my colleague who also teaches language arts."

In addition to collaborating with the grade-level teaching partners, four out of 10 participants collaborate with ESL teachers when planning for the teaching of academic vocabulary during content instruction. P2 explained, "We talk about what speaking assessments will look like, what vocabulary they need to know before taking the test. We make sure students have exposure and practice with those vocabulary words." P3 stated, "I usually collaborate with my ESL teacher to discuss vocabulary. We talk about those vocabulary words that we can reinforce during small groups." P6 detailed, "I share my

lesson plans and I would ask to support with the vocabulary aspect." P9 stated, "I ask ESL teacher about specific strategies I can use." This indicates that teachers plan collaboratively to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content.

This aligns with the conceptual framework concept of CALP. Cummins (2009) stated that ELLs' educational success depends on teachers' ability to develop and implement effective academic language and literacy instruction for these students. Planning is a critical aspect of effective instruction. Sahin-Taskin (2017) asserted that the quality of lesson planning directly affects classroom instruction. Echevarria et al. (2016) concurred by emphasizing the importance of planning for various student activities to help them understand new academic vocabulary words.

**Result Findings Relative to RQ3**

RQ3: How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition?

The analysis of the data related to RQ3 revealed one theme. All study participants reported that they plan a variety of listening, speaking, reading and writing assessments to support students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and academic language acquisition. There were no cases of nonconforming data relating to this research question.

***Theme 5: Teachers Plan for a Variety of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing Assessments***

Under this theme, all study participants indicated that they plan a variety of formal and informal assessments to support ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary

and academic language acquisition. When teachers plan assessments, they intend to address four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. P7, P9, and P10 reported that they plan to use questioning as an assessment strategy. P10 stated, "I plan to use frequent questioning and quizzes to assess students' knowledge of vocabulary." P7 added, "I assess students after each set of words. Each question is multiple choice." P9 explained,

> Some of the ways I assess are by having conversations with them. I plan to ask them to explain concepts of print, inferences, predictions, etc. I have also asked students to show me what they understand by drawing a picture or using manipulatives.

P1 and P5 shared about using personal interviews with students and anecdotal notes as assessment strategies. P1 stated, "I use personal interviews with students throughout the day… I ask comprehension questions after reading during personal interviews." P5 detailed, "I keep my notebook next to me and write what students are saying."

In addition to oral and written assessments, teachers use technology as an assessment tool when they plan for student assessments. All participants shared that implementing technology increases student interest and engagement. They also reported that some programs allow for immediate feedback, so when students can see right away what progress they make, it boosts their confidence. P7 stated, "With Google form when they are taking a short assessment, you start to hear kids say 'yes' or 'no.' They really care about how they are doing." P2, P3, and P7 reported the effectiveness of using Flipgrid as an assessment tool. P3 stated, "Using Flipgrid helps them to explain the

vocabulary words…. they could use the word in a sentence or a story, considering not only one word, but integrating all those vocabulary words." P7 detailed, "I put them on Flipgrid so they can talk about the word. Flipgrid is nice because it keeps everything as a record. If a student has trouble with the word, I can always go back and look." P2 explained, "Flipgrid… is really user-friendly for students. They can personalize it. Setting a creative approach to it makes it engaging for the students." P4 acknowledged the benefits of Pear Deck as an assessment tool, "I enjoy using Pear Deck in my lessons. I can have students type responses, draw and highlight the slides, and more." P8 shared the benefits of using Quizlet, "On this particular site, teachers when they plan can input the vocabulary words they want to target for the week." This indicates that teachers plan a variety of listening, speaking, reading, and writing assessments to support students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition.

This aligns with the research findings in the literature review. Abrams et al. (2016) stated that formal and informal assessments are used by general education teachers in all content areas to gather information about student learning. Gupta (2019) put forth that student learning should be assessed in multiple ways on an ongoing basis. Ongoing informal and formal assessments should be used throughout each lesson to review key vocabulary and content concepts and to provide students with regular feedback about their learning (Echevarria et al., 2016; Gupta, 2019). The theme also aligns with the conceptual framework concept of CALP. CALP is specific to the context of schooling; therefore, it can be defined as "the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling" (Cummins,

2000, p. 67). CALP requires ELLs to have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content (Cummins, 2009; Thomas & Collier, 2010). Therefore, when teachers plan and implement a variety of formal and informal assessments that involve listening, speaking, reading, and writing about learned content, they support ELLs' academic language acquisition.

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree of rigor and includes concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Creswell, 2013). Researchers' objective is to maintain trustworthiness and credibility by using different strategies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I implemented several strategies during this qualitative case study to verify its trustworthiness.

### Credibility

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) put forth that researchers must do their best to ensure the credibility and reliability of research. Credibility was assured by using reflexivity and member checking. Using reflexivity (thoughtful self-awareness of his/her experiences and reasoning) minimizes or alleviates potential biases (Ravitch, & Carl, 2016). I ensured that my perceptions about general education teachers' academic language instruction and my assumptions about how academic language should be taught did not interfere with the study. I achieved this by remaining neutral during interviews, asking the same questions of all interview participants, and relying solely on the collected data during the data analysis process. I also used detailed descriptions when I analyzed and compared the data

from all study participants. As Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted, comparing similar experiences between participants of the study helps to evaluate its credibility.

One adjustment was made to credibility strategies, outlined in Chapter 3. Initially, I planned to utilize a prolonged contact strategy to ensure the credibility of the study. Prolonged contact supports reflexivity and involves the researcher's familiarity with the context of the study (Johnson et al., 2020). Since I collected all the data virtually and did not have access to the participants' teaching environments, I utilized member checking instead of prolonged contact to ensure credibility. Member checking involves checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During member checking all study participants had an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations of the collected data and make revisions, if necessary.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which qualitative research results can be transferred to different settings with other participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used a rich, thick description to ensure the transferability of this qualitative case study. Thick descriptions mean detailed descriptions of data and context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview audio recordings were transcribed and checked for accuracy by using playback. I supplied detailed quotations from the participants when describing data analysis and study findings. There were no adjustments to transferability strategies stated in Chapter 3.

**Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I utilized member checking to strengthen the dependability of the research findings. Member checking supports dependability and involves checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). All study participants took part in virtual member checking and had an opportunity to confirm that the collected data were interpreted correctly or to make revisions if necessary. I also kept detailed notes about the process of data collection and data management available for the review. No adjustments were made to dependability strategies stated in Chapter 3.

**Conformability**

Conformability refers to the neutrality of the research findings. Conformability is concerned with confirming that the interpretation of the collected data is not based on the researcher's opinions, but solely based on data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I utilized reflexivity and member checking to ensure the conformability of the research findings. Member checking involves checking back with the study participants to see if they have any comments or concerns about the data interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). All study participants had an opportunity to confirm that the collected data were interpreted correctly and to make revisions if necessary. Reflexivity refers to thoughtful self-awareness of the researcher's experiences and reasoning in order to minimize or alleviate potential biases (Ravitch, & Carl, 2016). Using reflexivity helped to alleviate potential biases and to ensure the neutrality of the research findings. I achieved that by remaining

neutral during interviews, asking the same questions of all interview participants, and relying solely on the collected data during the data analysis process. No adjustments were made to conformability strategies stated in Chapter 3.

## Summary

To answer the research questions for this qualitative case study I utilized two data sources: the preinterview questionnaire and individual semistructured interviews. In summary, this study findings revealed that general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies select a variety of strategies for academic vocabulary instruction and academic language acquisition for ELLs. Teachers use background knowledge and instructional delivery models as guides for the selection of the instructional strategies. This study further revealed that teachers plan collaboratively for academic vocabulary instruction and use curriculum and instruction to guide their planning. Lastly, this research study revealed that teachers plan and implement a variety of listening, speaking, reading, and writing assessments to support academic language acquisition and academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs.

Chapter 5 includes an introduction, which restates the purpose and nature of this qualitative case study, why it was conducted, an interpretation of the findings, and how they relate to the literature review and the conceptual framework of the study. Furthermore, Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for social change. Chapter 5 also contains the conclusion, which reports the significance of the study.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

## Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies plan, implement, and assess instructional strategies to support academic language development and academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs. I conducted this qualitative case study to address the gap in research that relates to elementary teachers' experiences implementing academic language instruction for ELLs. The research questions in this study were analytical in nature. They were structured as such to explore how elementary general education teachers plan, implement, and assess academic language instruction for ELLs. Cummins' (1979) theory of second language acquisition informed the theoretical framework of this qualitative case study. I used Cummins' theory of second language acquisition as the lens to explore elementary general education teachers' views and opinions about implementing academic language instruction to ELLs. I also used it to interpret the study's data that pertained to each research question to identify the key findings of this qualitative case study. The key findings that emerged for the research questions revealed that elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies plan and implement a variety of listening, speaking, reading and writing instructional strategies for teaching academic language to ELLs. The key findings also revealed that teachers utilize various assessments to support ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition.

## Interpretation of the Findings

This qualitative case study's findings were interpreted through the lens of Cummins' (1979) theory of second language and informed by the literature review**.** Cummins' (1979) theory of second language acquisition provides description of the difference between BICS and CALP. It also emphasizes the importance of CALP as it relates to the academic success of ELLs. In his theory, Cummins (1979) explained that CALP requires ELLs to have the skills to listen, speak, read, and write about the learned content, use more advanced sentence structures, and know how to compare, synthesize, evaluate, and infer. Cummins (2009) further stated that to ensure ELLs' academic success, teachers must understand their linguistic needs and provide rich and meaningful instruction that supports ELLs' academic language growth. Therefore, Cummins' theory of second language acquisition worked well as the conceptual framework for data analysis and data interpretation within this qualitative case study.

The subsequent sections outline the interpretation of the study's key findings for each research question based on the conceptual framework, followed by reference to the related research included in the literature review. First, I present the interpretation of the findings for the first research question. Then, I present the interpretation of the findings for the second research question. Finally, I present the interpretation of the findings for the third research question. The findings for each research question include a synthesis of those findings.

**Research Question 1**

RQ1: How do teachers select strategies for academic language development and academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs?

The key findings that emerged from the first research question were related to teacher use of ELLs' background knowledge and instructional delivery models as guides for selecting strategies for academic vocabulary instruction. The first key finding indicated that elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies consider ELLs' background knowledge when they select instructional strategies for academic language development and academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs. Under this finding, the overall consensus was that students' learning needs, prior knowledge, and language proficiency levels are important factors to consider when selecting academic vocabulary instructional strategies. This goes along well with Cummins' (2009) position of the importance of teachers' knowledge of ELLs' needs when they provide academic language instruction. Cummins (2009) asserted that to ensure ELLs' academic success, teachers must understand their linguistic needs and provide rich and meaningful instruction that supports ELLs' academic language growth.

The second key finding was that elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies consider instructional delivery models when they select strategies for academic language development and academic language instruction to ELLs. Under this finding, the study participants agreed that selecting and implementing various academic vocabulary instructional strategies during whole group and small group instruction supports ELLs' knowledge of academic

vocabulary and their academic language acquisition. This finding aligns with Cummins' (1979) view about the importance of providing effective academic language instruction to ELLs because it supports their development of CALP. This finding also aligns with the existing literature that emphasizes the benefits of using various instructional strategies for academic vocabulary instruction to ELLs. For example, Echevarria et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of planning for student activities that help them understand new academic vocabulary words and various ways to learn them. Gupta (2019), Gonzales (2016) and Wissink and Stark (2019) added that ELLs need to have opportunities to practice using new vocabulary words in multiple ways during interactions with their classmates.

**Research Question 2**

RQ2: How do teachers plan to incorporate the teaching of academic vocabulary into the teaching of the academic content?

The next two key findings emerged from the second research question. These key findings were related to the benefits of teacher collaboration and their use of curriculum and content standards as guides during planning for academic vocabulary instruction. The fourth key finding revealed that teacher collaboration during planning for academic vocabulary instruction supports lesson effectiveness. Under this finding, eight study participants shared that they find collaboration with colleagues beneficial because it helps with the selection of academic vocabulary words and instructional strategies they intend to implement. In addition, three study participants pointed out the benefits of sharing lesson plans because it helps with the consistency in selecting academic vocabulary

strategies across content areas. This finding aligns with the existing literature that emphasizes the importance of thoughtful lesson planning for well-designed lessons. Echevarria et al. (2016), Harman and Wood (2018), and Gonzales (2016) all reported that there is a direct relationship between the quality of lesson planning and classroom instruction and that teachers must consider various factors when planning for academic vocabulary instruction for ELLs. Sahin-Taskin (2017) concurred by stating that thoughtful planning is the foundation for well-designed lessons.

The fifth key finding indicated that using curriculum and content standards to guide lesson planning supports the selection of academic vocabulary that ELLs need to know to demonstrate knowledge of required content. Aligned with the existing literature, ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary directly affects their knowledge of content. Fisher and Frey (2014) and Robb (2016) asserted that there is a direct connection between academic vocabulary and content. Echevarria et al. (2016) further posited that knowledge of words and phrases widely used in academic disciplines supports academic language proficiency and improves ELLs' ability to construct meaning from various complex texts. This position was supported by Harman and Wood (2018) and Ibrahim et al. (2016), who reported that limited knowledge of academic vocabulary prevents ELLs from understanding content-specific complex texts and negatively affects reading comprehension.

**Research Question 3**

RQ3: How do teachers plan assessments for supporting students' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition?

The fifth key finding emerged for the third research question and indicated that teachers plan a variety of listening, speaking, reading, and writing assessments to support ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition. This finding also aligns with the existing literature that emphasizes the importance of assessments. Abrams et al. (2016), Echevarria et al. (2016), and Gupta (2019) stressed the importance of using assessment to measure student academic performance, review key vocabulary, and provide students with regular feedback about their learning. These findings also align with the concept of CALP that Cummins (1979) described in his theory of second language acquisition. CALP is vital for ELLs' academic success because it deals with skills essential to academics, such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Cummins, 2009). When teachers plan to implement listening, speaking, reading, and writing assessments during teaching content, they support ELLs' academic language development and knowledge of academic vocabulary. ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary improves their CALP skills and, therefore, positively contributes to their overall academic success.

## Limitations of the Study

One limitation arose from the execution of this qualitative case study. This limitation is due to only involving elementary general education teachers who teach in public schools. The participants of this qualitative case study included 10 elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies in culturally and linguistically diverse public schools in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. Therefore, the findings of this qualitative case study may not be representative of

all elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States.

## Recommendations

The recommendation for future research is based on the strengths, limitations, and literature review for this study. This qualitative case study offered rich data about elementary teachers' experiences with planning, implementing, and assessing academic language instruction for ELLs. This study was limited to only involving elementary general education teachers who teach in public schools. My recommendation is that further research should replicate this study in private schools. Elementary general education teachers who teach language arts, math, science, and social studies in private schools might provide additional views and opinions about how they plan, implement, and assess academic language instruction to ELLs. Such additional data would be valuable for researchers and educators who want to further explore academic vocabulary instruction for ELLs in general education classrooms.

## Implications

The results from this qualitative case study provide several contributions to positive social change. The first contribution is the advancement to the profession of teaching diverse learners by revealing teachers' views and experiences about providing academic language instruction to ELLs in general education classrooms. The findings of this study yielded elementary general education teachers' insights about academic language instruction for ELLs and the ways they plan, implement, and assess

instructional strategies to support ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition.

The second contribution of this study to positive social change is the advancement to stakeholders' involvement in the transformation of organizations. Gaining more in-depth insights about teachers' experiences with teaching academic language to ELLs helps to ensure that academic language instruction is not only implemented with fidelity but also with the understanding to encourage the effectiveness and reliability of implemented academic language instruction through teacher buy-in.

The third contribution of this study to positive social change is to prepare ELLs to be college and career ready. This qualitative case study informs how academic language instruction can support ELLs' development of CALP. When ELLs are proficient in academic language, they will be able to achieve academic success in all academic disciplines, which will make them better prepared to be college and career ready.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore elementary general education teachers' experiences with academic language instruction for ELLs. The results from this study add to the existing literature that addresses various ways to support academic success of ELLs in general education classrooms. This qualitative case study revealed that academic vocabulary instruction must be an essential part of academic language instruction because knowledge of academic vocabulary increases ELLs' ability to communicate about the learned content. The study also revealed the importance of utilizing various listening, speaking, reading and writing instructional strategies and

assessments to support ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary and their academic language acquisition.

This qualitative case study expands understanding and relevance of academic language instruction for ELLs. It draws attention to the significance of CALP and the importance of supporting ELLs' proficiency in all four language domains, which are listening, speaking reading and writing. It also offers ways to plan, implement, and assess academic language instruction for ELLs. It is my hope that the findings of this qualitative case study will inform educators in their efforts to implement academic language instruction for ELLs that supports their academic language proficiency and increases their overall academic success.

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## Appendix A: Preinterview Questionnaire

1. According to the research, academic language instruction should be part of content instruction. Describe how you incorporate academic language instruction into teaching content.
2. Research says that knowledge of academic vocabulary helps English language learners (ELLs) comprehend content-specific texts and improves their literacy skills. Describe how you choose academic vocabulary that you intend to teach.
3. Research says that quality of lesson plans directly affects classroom instruction Describe how you plan for academic vocabulary instruction.
4. According to English Language Development (ELD) Standards, ELLs should be able to communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in language arts, math, science, and social studies. Describe how your instruction of academic vocabulary helps ELLs meet ELD standards.
5. According to the research, it is important that teachers use ongoing assessments to review key academic vocabulary and provide students with regular feedback about their learning. Share the ways you assess effectiveness of academic vocabulary instruction.

## Appendix B: Teacher Interview Questions

1. How do you select instructional strategies or academic language development and teaching academic vocabulary to ELLs?
2. How do you select academic vocabulary words that you intend to teach?
3. How do you know that the words that you choose to teach help ELLs with reading comprehension and communication?
4. What academic vocabulary instructional strategies do you find most effective? Why?
5. How do you plan for incorporating academic vocabulary instruction into content instruction?
6. Describe how your instruction of academic vocabulary helps ELLs attain academic language proficiency.
7. Describe how you collaborate with colleagues when you plan for academic vocabulary instruction?
8. Describe how you plan assessments to support ELLs' knowledge of academic vocabulary and academic language acquisition.

# Appendix C: Teacher Invitation Letter

Dear_____

My name is Irina Malykhina. I am a doctorate student at Walden University.

This week I am recruiting participant for my doctorate study "Exploring Elementary Teachers' Instruction of Academic Language for English Language Learners." The study will involve filling out the questionnaire and participating in a 30 minutes interview about participants' experiences with academic language instruction for English language learners.

You are invited to participate in this study. Please respond to this email whether or not you would like to participate.

I will provide detailed information about the study process and your participation after I receive your positive response.

I look forward to your response

Sincerely,

Irina Malykhina