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Exploring the Strategies English as a Second Language Teachers Use to Teach Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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EdS, Walden University, 2012

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

In the local school district under study located in southern United States, English as second language (ESL) students are experiencing lower than expected standardized testing scores according to expectations set forth by the state Department of Education. The purpose of this project study was to explore the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students. The conceptual framework was Gagne's conditions of learning theory, which is used to assess students' lack of preparation for future academic and career success. The research question asked what strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students. A qualitative exploratory case study with purposive sampling was used to select high school ESL teachers who taught ESL students. Data were collected through 10 semistructured interviews and 10 classroom observations. Data were analyzed using Hatch's nine-step typological process. The finding indicated that ESL teachers use specific strategies such as motivational reading, vocabulary, content scaffolding, and effective reading development strategies for ESL students to increase their proficiency in English. The key recommendation was a district-wide professional development for high school ESL teachers to learn how to support ESL students for these students to increase their proficiency in literacy. The implications for positive social change include teaching strategies for high school ESL teachers to use to strengthen ESL students' literacy skills for these students to be successful in the classroom and graduate from high school.

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Dedication

First, I want to give all praises to God who has and will always be the head of my life, without Him none of this would be possible. I dedicate this project study to my three sons Alexander, Zachary, and Kristopher and my special friends who have been there for me every step of the way cheering me on and giving me encouraging words to keep me moving.

To my father and mother Al and Peggy, who have never left my side and have never stopped believing in me. I will always appreciate the sacrifices my parents made for me to become the educator I am today. To my aunt Shirley and best friend Shunda for always being there when I needed them the most and felt like no one else understood. And finally, to my colleagues, this project study would not have been finalized without your help and support.

This doctoral journey has not been easy for me due to several circumstances that I could have used as excuses to quit; however, I did not give up and it was because of these special people and my EdD committee chairperson Dr. Peter Kiriakidis and because of him I was able to finish the project study. Thus, I give a very special and exclusive appreciation to my chairperson Dr. Peter Kiriakidis because he went above and beyond to help me get this project study completed when I felt like giving up. Dr. Peter Kiriakidis was always readily available when I needed him the most.

Achieving this goal of finishing my doctoral degree, would not have been possible without the aforementioned people. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for always being there when I needed you. Also, thank you all for believing in me!

Acknowledgments

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Section 1: The Problem

In the local school district under study, English as second language (ESL) students are experiencing lower than expected standardized testing scores according to expectations set forth by the state Department of Education (DOE). The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, case study was to explore the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students.

Definition of the Problem

Achievement gaps are prevalent in the modern educational landscape of the United States despite decades of making general headway in narrowing achievement gaps and disparities in educational outcomes related to ethnicity, income, and English language proficiency (Alsliman, 2020). In this study, I examined the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students in a high school located in the southern United States. The study site has the largest population of ESL students and the largest number of teachers and district personnel who work with an ESL population of any high school in the-school district. The 2015–2019 standardized test scores of annual yearly progress (AYP) for ESL students at high school are categorized by proficient, basic, and below basic levels (see Table 1).

The local DOE has an expectation that the percentage of ESL students who attain proficiency and beyond increases each year with an overall goal of 95% proficiency. ESL students had not met this goal, and from 2015 to 2019, the AYP for ESL students has shown a steady decline from 23% in 2011 to 0% by 2013 and not improving through

2015. In 2011, no ESL students achieved the advanced level, only 23% were proficient, and 77% scored below basic (see Table 1).

Table 1

End of Course Assessments

	Ending School Year				
Levels	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Advanced	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Proficient	26.0%	13.52%	0%	0%	0%
Basic	0%	85.0%	77.2%	63.9%	72.7%
Below basic	78.5%	0%	31.8%	36.1%	27.3%

In 2016, the percentage of students attaining a proficient level decreased to 13.52%, the percentage scoring basic increased to 85% and no students were below basic. Between 2015 and 2019, no ESL students scored proficient or advanced. In 2017, the percentage of students who scored basic decreased to 77.2% and below basic increased to 31.8%. Finally, in 2018, the percentage of students who achieved the basic level decreased to 63.9% and below basic increased to 36.1%.

The study site is mandated to follow the state guidelines for graduation and appropriate steps must be taken to reasonably assure that students meet those standards. The state DOE requires that schools identify problem areas, address barriers, and implement measures to improve weaknesses that have the potential to hamper the ability of ESL students to demonstrate competencies related to English and reading skills.

According to an 2018 AdvancED Executive Summary from the study site, an analysis of the demographics for the school revealed a diverse and heterogeneous population among the students. In order to adequately meet the needs of such a diverse population, verbal and written communication is translated into the native language of the student and parent/guardian. Some bilingual students help staff with translating the morning announcements, and designated translators are available on campus during the regular school day and to assist with parent-teacher conferences. The faculty is committed to ensuring that all students attain success and have set a goal to achieve 90% proficiency on all state and federal summative assessments as well as 60% proficient performance on an advanced level assessment.

Another ongoing focus of the faculty and staff has been to increase the school's graduation rate. Between 2017 and 2019, the graduation rates were 67.9%, 70.5%, and 65.8%, respectively. One facet of the graduation rate statistics is the inclusion of students who fail accountability testing in the overall percentage of students who meet graduation requirements. Aggregate data compiled showed that ESL students are not meeting the standards on the English/language arts assessment at the rate of their peers and are, therefore, not proficient in the skills assessed by this measure. Scores on this portion of the standardized test showed a decrease in mastery when compared to the previous years.

The student population is culturally and linguistically diverse, with an ethnic breakdown of students is as follows: 15 Native American (.02%), 45 Asian (4.3%), 479 African American (45.9%), 327 Hispanic (31.3%), 1 Native Hawaiian (0.1%), and 190 European American (18.2%). According to an executive summary report released by

administration, the diverse facets of the school provide its students with a unique social learning experience. The students coexist in an environment that mirrors the realistic cultures of the community and world, giving them the experience of learning to function in an ever-complex society and share cultural ideologies with peers from various ethnic backgrounds.

U.S. public schools have seen increased enrollment in the number of students who speak English as a second language in recent decades. The rapid growth in the ESL student population is due, in part, to the dramatic demographic change in the United States over the past 30 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) substantiated this increase reporting that the percentage of ELL students in U.S. public schools was higher during 2017–2018 school year (9.4 %, or an estimated 4.6 million students) than in 2018–2019 school year (9.3%, or an estimated 4.5 million students).

The local DOE provides additional information on a particular portion of this growing ELL population, specifically students who have gained a level of English proficiency to exit the sheltered instruction program and who are now enrolled in mainstreamed classes. Barrow and Pithers (2016) explained that the possible causes for deficiencies among ESL students are language barriers, inadequately trained teachers, and disruptive behavior. Of these challenges, they identified language barriers as the most overwhelming for nonnative, English speaking, international students. Teachers need to help students overcome these challenges to be successful and make progress. In order to

district and state achievement expectations, it is imperative that schools create more

effective ways to address language barriers and the impact on reading performance.

<div align="center">**Rationale**</div>

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

A majority of ESL students in local school district achieve low standardized test

scores compared to students whose dominant language is English. In the 2015–2017

school years, there were no proficient ESL students at the local high school, which was

the target location for this study. The goal for the local school district, per mandates set

by the state DOE, is for an increasing percentage of students to move toward proficiency

and beyond each year. Since 2015, the AYP within the district for ESL students has

shown a steady decline (see Table 1). This decline in performance supported a need to

examine current ESL instructional strategies.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

According to the local Diploma Project (DP; 2017), all high school students in the

state must complete 22 credits and perform satisfactorily on state mandated End of

Course (EOC) exams to graduate. In 2009, the DP made a modification to raise

graduation standards requiring that student performance on the EOC tests is factored into

semester grades as a percentage of their final grades in their core classes. According to

the state DOE, in the instance that the student is performing below proficient levels in a

core class and scores below proficient on their EOC exam, it is possible that the student

could fail the class and not earn a diploma. This presents a problem for ELL students.

According to the state DOE, developing competent and fair testing mechanisms is not

just a problem within the state but is a concern that has arisen nationally over the last 20 years as a result of national and state test score declines, unflattering international achievement comparisons, the failure of funding increases to produce discernible results, high school dropout rates, and a perception that school and work are insufficiently closely aligned.

Definitions of Key Terms

Achievement gaps: The differences in academic performance among groups of students of varied backgrounds with respect to their ethnic, gender, disability, English language learner, and/or income status (Hung et al., 2020).

ESL: According to the state DOE, ESL is a methodology and curriculum designed to teach English language learner students English language skills, such as speaking, reading, writing, study skills, content vocabulary, and cultural orientation. Instruction is generally in English with little use of native language.

Language barriers: Barriers to communication resulting from speaking different languages. A limited factor in non-English speaking students that makes it difficult to communicate (Carlson, 2019).

Language proficiency: The degree to which a student demonstrates command over the use of language, including expressive and receptive language skills in the categories of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, semantics, and language use within various social settings (Neil, 2017).

Pathways: A route to or way of access to; way of reaching or achieving something (Rubin & Sanford, 2018). Pathways help school leaders and teachers design and

implement blended and personalized learning initiatives based on needs and interests to make to make improvements (Rubin & Sanford, 2018).

Pull-out services: Specialists provide students with instructional support, differentiated instruction, and related services in the general education classroom (Williams & Ditch, 2019).

Push-in services: Specialists provide students with instructional support or related services outside of the general education classroom in small groups or one-on-one in a separate setting (Williams & Ditch, 2019).

Scaffolding: Per the state DOE, a teaching method that uses instructional techniques that break up learning concepts to progress students toward stronger understanding and independence in the learning process.

Significance

This study is significant for ESL educators who participate in the design and implementation of curriculum and teaching strategies for ESL students. It is imperative that communities and organizations collaborate on strategies to narrow the gaps in ESL student achievement to increase the number of high school graduates. The findings of this study provide ESL teachers with strategies to teach ESL students to be prepared for the requirements of standardized tests. The findings of this study may also help teachers with strategies for assisting ESL students. This study includes suggestions for ESL teachers to enhance instructional programs by using best teaching practices and proven and researched teaching and learning approaches and classroom content. The implications for positive social change include strategies that ESL teachers can use to strengthen ESL

students' literacy skills to better prepare them to be successful in the classroom and graduate from high school.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was:

What strategies do ESL teachers use to teach ESL students?

Review of the Literature

This literature review is divided into the following subsections: conceptual framework, achievement levels of immigrant adolescents, teacher knowledge, English as a second language, English language skills, ethnic/social background to instructional practice, reading, teacher preparation, and standardized testing. In the first, second, and third subsections, I examine the achievement levels of ESL students and identify factors that are or are not effective to determine future success for ESL students. The fourth, fifth, and sixth subsections include discussions of the most effective methods for developing reading and language skills. Finally, in the seventh, eighth, and ninth subsections, I offer the most effective strategies for improving instruction and research strategies, including key ingredients and factors that can improve learning.

I used the following electronic databases to search for literature for this review: Education Research Complete, Educational Resources Information Center, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Central. The keywords used to search the databases were: *reading strategies, ESL, English skills, teacher knowledge, standardized testing, teaching strategies, language barriers,* and *professional development*. The reference lists of articles reviewed provided additional sources and information.

Conceptual Framework

Robert Gagne was an educational psychologist who developed a nine-step process called the nine events of instruction (IIie, 2016). Gagne's model was designed to guide educators and curriculum designers in a systematic instructional design process that emphasizes the behaviorist approach to learning with focus on the outcomes or behaviors of instruction or training. Gagne's model provides a framework for communication that supports the learning process where students are more inclined to be engaged and retain information using the following nine steps:

1. Gain learners' attention.

2. State the objectives and outcomes.

3. Stimulate recall.

4. Present and cue lessons.

5. Provide learning guidance.

6. Activate learning processing.

7. Provide feedback of students' performance.

8. Test learning.

9. Help learners internalize new knowledge. (IIie, 2016)

I based the conceptual framework of this study on Gagne's conditions of learning that are useful to the understanding of the aims and objectives of teachers and students (see Brady & Adamson, 2019). IIie (2016) focused on teachers' understanding of reading and English deficiencies among ESL students. Gagne's model helps teachers categorize teaching and learning strategies into four distinct segments that focus on the different

conditions needed to effectively teach ESL students and provides various strategies that can be used to obtain teaching and learning objectives (IIie, 2016). Gagne's theory can be used by ESL teachers as a tool to help students comprehend the various texts that are used as part of the curriculum. The theory addresses factors, such as poorly printed text, unfamiliar words, lack of background knowledge, noun usage, words with multiple meanings, text about art, and difficult concepts expressed in books and on standardized tests for ESL students.

Gagne's conditions of learning would be a starting point to address several common learning barriers for ESL students, such as, but not exclusive to: language barriers, the lack of parallel testing mechanisms, inadequate training of teachers to prepare ESL students for various facets of the curriculum, scarce availability of teaching and learning strategies and best practices, inadequate accommodations for ESL students, and inability of a number of parents of ESL students to assist their children on English-based assignments (IIie, 2016). Gagne's conditions of learning are an instructional model from the perspective of formulating positive learning context through teacher–student relationships (IIie, 2016). The effectiveness of the adapted model was tested on university instructors and yielded a substantial correlation between the adapted model and students' assessment of the effectiveness of the learning activity, leading to the conclusion that the adapted model further affords practical navigation for the development of instructional technique (IIie, 2016). Gagne's model was useful to this study where the population of study site was chosen to evaluate the effectiveness of the systematic ESL learning program and gather teacher perceptions of the program.

Achievement Levels of Immigrant Adolescents

Zabala et al. (2016) found that the academic success of immigrant children and adolescents is directly tied to two primary factors: school engagement and accountability mechanisms. Schools have the responsibility to closely assess and analyze individual and group differences in academic achievement from the perspective of a multilevel and integrative model of immigrant youths' adaptation. The academic achievement of immigrant children and adolescents is a clear indicator of current and future success of their adaptive practices; therefore, the success of their path through school becomes a high stakes marker both for the individual and for the society.

ESL programs provide an institutional response to these students' needs, the effect of which may vary according to the proportion of immigrant students in the school. Zabala et al.(2016) suggested that school context may shape the pathways through which ESL placement impacts students' academic achievement and preparation by the end of high school. Immigrant students placed in ESL programs in schools with high concentrations of immigrant students tend to perform better academically than immigrant students that do not have the benefit of ESL programs in schools with fewer immigrants.

ELL students participate in language assistance programs to help ensure that they attain English proficiency and meet the same academic content and achievement standards expected of all students. Participation in these programs can improve students' English language proficiency, which, in turn, is associated with improved educational outcomes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Johnson (2018) found that ELL students may acquire conversational skills quickly but still may lack academic

language proficiency, placing them at a disadvantage. In some scenarios, students may appear proficient because they are able to participate in conversation, but their lack of academic proficiency hinders them from interacting meaningfully with the school curriculum.

Deci and Ryan (2016) explored effective school improvement by assessing educational change that enhances learning outcomes and the school's capacity for managing change. In their study, the thematic analysis of data from staff interviews demonstrated that the effectiveness of school improvement programs rested on staff participation in terms of capacity and perceptions of change and stability of the school before program implementation. These elements were incorporated into a model of school improvement. Goal attainment scores were significantly correlated with fidelity of program participation. Evaluative mechanisms like these are critical to assess barriers in language and assessments (Zabala et al., 2016) as well as provide guidance, strategies, and tools for teachers to promote academic success for all students.

Teacher Knowledge

Rizzuto (2017) explored the knowledge level of teachers who teach ELL students and found that the amount of knowledge and training that teachers possess directly affects what and how the students learn. Rizzuto concluded that the more knowledge preparation provided to teachers, the better students learn and also underscored the importance for teachers to understand all the elements that constitute an adequate knowledge base in order to maximize student learning and better prepare teacher

candidates for the most acute needs of language teaching by attending professional

development and other related ELL workshops.

Rizzuto (2017) also explored how ESL teachers' own ethnic and social

backgrounds influence their instructional practices, recommending that prospective

teachers maintain journals about instruction in their classroom as a mechanism to reflect

on their social/ethnic backgrounds, perspectives, and assumptions to determine how

personal histories shape pedagogical choices when developing educational programs and

curricula. Rizzuto's recommendation directly supports Vafai's (2016) conclusions by

suggesting that teachers must be well versed in their instructional practices. Vafai

examined the political implications of new trends in adult ESL training and concluded

that teachers must also understand the dynamics of 21st century skills from a cultural

standpoint so they can create more effective intercultural teaching and learning programs

within their individual classrooms.

English As a Second Language

Severinsen et al. (2018) conducted a study that evaluated content learning tasks

for the ESL community in and out of school. The researchers found that more attention

must be given to daily language support for ESL learners, including translating signs,

reading school documents, and offering Spanish courses for teachers. Severinsen et al.

concluded that although daily language support is essential for ESL students, they must

also receive in-depth, long-term learning strategies to be equipped with the proper skills

to make necessary gains in the English language. In order to ensure that educators

consistently provide ESL students with a wide range of learning opportunities for

economic and academic success, school administrators must have a process to reexamine the teaching and learning strategies that the instructors are utilizing.

Instructional Strategies

Sparks (2016) focused on methods to improve ESL students' learning, ways to motivate them to incorporate pertinent reading skills as they learn to read English texts, and best practices for teaching ESL students who are struggling readers. To increase the reading proficiency of ESL students, Sparks suggested using coteaching (i.e., pullout/push-in tutoring); sheltered English instruction; bilingual instruction; motivational reading strategies; and other researched reading practices, such as summarizing, sequencing, utilizing inferences, comparing and contrasting, finding the main idea, and relating background knowledge and other connectors to the text.

The fundamental teaching of reading skills is critical when working with the ESL population because before students can be introduced to various reading material, they must present basic knowledge and understanding of learning methods. Sparks (2016) explained that this scaffolding technique is one of the most effective teaching and learning strategies within this population of students. Rahim and Chun (2017) investigated literature with regards to pedagogical approaches to teaching mathematics to ESL students. Part of their investigation included examining the communication difficulties when teaching students who are not native speakers of standard English and teaching strategies used by language arts teachers in the classroom to assist second language learners. Rahim and Chun concluded that ESL learners benefit from specialized instruction and are capable of excelling in an environment where learning opportunities

consist of effective pedagogical practices. For example, vocabulary strategies comprised from text that students are reading in class are likely to interest them and motivate them to be actively engaged and participate in lessons.

Other literature extended and elaborated on the need for teaching strategies to enhance the understanding and performance of ESL students. Daryazadeh et al. (2019) explained that classroom teachers could do several things to be more prepared to meet the needs of students in addition to using assessments and questionnaires to determine students' learning styles, thereby creating an environment that is more conducive to learning. Daryazadeh et al. also stated that with some background, assessments, and an understanding of the students' learning styles, teachers can combine that knowledge with strategies to heighten their ability to reach all students. These strategies can be particularly useful for students who possess the most critical gaps in understanding and comprehension. Daryazadeh et al. introduced four roles that teachers may take on to increase their effectiveness in various learning situations: facilitator, consultant, coach, and instructor. Each role can be applicable based upon the amount of content and direction required to achieve the outcome as defined by the learning objective of a lesson.

English Language Skills

As educators, administrators, school districts, and states continue to improve high stakes testing, they must uncover the primary issues that are common throughout the country in regards to the low performance of ESL students and formulate a solution. Rahim and Chun (2017) proposed that teachers need more diverse modes of training on how ESL students can grow and develop in literacy involving a second language. For

teachers to effectively utilize instruction strategies, they need to be trained to develop knowledge about diverse cultures, potential areas of cultural conflict, and similarities and differences between students' native languages and the target language. Rahim and Chun explored the comprehension of ESL background, school attendance, work independence, knowledge of basic concepts, preparation and management of resources, analysis of learning experiences, development of units and sequencing activities, adoption of new practices, and assessment of learning and understanding. The participants in the qualitative study consisted of disadvantaged Australian students who were learning English as a second language, and data were gathered through interviews and field notes. Rahim and Chun found that teachers must rethink their pedagogical practices to adequately administer them within the population of disadvantaged students.

Although English and ESL teachers have astute levels of knowledge of their subject area, these teachers can still struggle with teaching ESL students because of language barriers (Cirocki & Farrelly, 2016). It is important to become more reflective about one's practice as an educator as it relates to ESL students in order to deal with increasingly difficult situations and specific needs of learners in the classroom. Cirocki and Farrelly (2016) stated that it is important to be progressive in classroom research practices in order for teachers to be successful, and their practices must be reflective of current ESL pedagogy and teacher professional development. When there are new and evolving evidence-based trends in teaching, they should be embraced, so that teachers have the means to present material in a new and more concise manner.

Ethnic and Social Backgrounds to Instructional Practices

      According to Rymes et al. (2016), ESL and bilingual education teachers have a critical role in education. ESL teachers have the responsibility to teach students who have some familiarity with the English language, as well as those students who have absolutely no knowledge of the English language (Rymes et al., 2016). Rymes et al. argued that in the current phase of educational reform, assessments must be clearly aligned to standards established for ESL students.

      The grant requires there to be a common mode of testing of ESL student-proficiency against a set of consistent standards that correspond with a set of established college-and career-ready standards in English, language arts, and mathematics. The grant also requires that results from high-stakes testing of all ESL students are valid, reliable, and that all common core state standards consortium states engage in a unified, regulated system of instructing and assessing ESL students. As the population of ELLs continues to grow in the United States., it is vital that states and districts address the new paradigm in instruction by including all domains of language acquisition across the curriculum. The grant additionally requires the use of complex texts in the ELL program to prepare students to close the wide achievement gaps, by improving their academic performance and ultimately raising high-stakes test scores (Rymes et al., 2016).

      The common alignment of ELL tests directly addresses the issue of testing discrepancies that have been occurring across the nation. Relyea and Amendum (2019) argued that children in the United States who come to school speaking a language other than English and whose English language skills are insufficient to function successfully

in English-only classrooms are typically classified as English language learners; thus, ventures to incorporate a variety of teaching strategies into ESL classrooms is lauded. It is imperative that ESL students are provided with appropriate guidance and scaffolding. Most literature is bound by culture; ESL students generally do not have the necessary background knowledge or understanding of texts to fill in necessary literary blanks in order to be as successful as native English-speaking students.

In an effort to understand how to better service ESL learners, Lewis and Holloway (2018) conducted a study to explore the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy of Australia, which has influenced how teachers understand their work and learning, particularly as it relates to the literacy practices most valued under these circumstances. Holloway concluded that research into effective literacy practices is more beneficial and should be drawn upon to help inform policy makers' decisions, rather than relying heavily upon standardized tests. In order for teachers to help ESL students be successful and better test takers, it is important to utilize first-rate, proven instructional methods to simplify the instructional process.

Lailiyah et al. (2019) indicated that reading comprehension vitally important in the learning and teaching ESL. Lailiyah suggested that teachers use linguistic scaffolding to better understand students' language development and utilize instructional methods in order to help ESL students achieve desired success. Johnson (2018) suggested that along with linguistic scaffolding, content scaffolding is also useful for helping ELL students. Some content scaffolding strategies listed by Johnson include, increased wait time; think-pair share strategies; graphic organizers; visual aids and supports; synonyms for content-

specific words; and use of total physical response. Teachers who use content scaffolding strategies in their classroom will be able to help ELL students along with non-ELL students.

Teaching and Reading

Lin et al. (2017) explained that educators will always be challenged by testing standards and curriculum requirements to effectively teach students in order to improve student learning. Lin et al. offered that the desire to read, especially in social studies, relates to a reader's connection to the material. To read effectively means comprehending the content of the text and Scaffolding tools in the classroom can guide improvement in reading comprehension by helping students connect to the text. Furthermore, Lin et al. noted in a recent study of effective reading development strategies in ELL/ESL classrooms, that multiple reading strategies can be combined in order to provide much needed textual support for ELL students. These strategies include: modified guided reading, developmental reading assessments, and aggressive intervention methods.

Planning and instruction are crucial for ELLL/ESL instruction and success. For example, in order to meet the reading needs of ELL/ESL students, teachers can progressively increase the difficulty of texts as the students becomes a more independent reader. Generally, ELL/ESL students struggle with decoding texts, pronouncing words, improvement in fluency, and comprehension of vocabulary-themed assignments. Lin et al. (2017) found that because of these struggles, ELL students usually have difficulty following along and remaining actively engaged during the learning process in standard guided reading groups. ESL and regular classroom teachers must be equipped with the

knowledge and tools to effectively teach modified guided reading to ensure that students will show progress in their reading development and comprehension. Isolated guided reading is simply not enough for ELL/ESL students who are performing below grade level.

In order to bridge the learning gaps and testing disparities, ESL students should have access to the same books and materials as mainstream students. In a 2015 study, Avineri et al. (2015) questioned whether the resources and materials that ESL students use are beneficial and supportive for their academic growth. Grammar textbooks and materials are essential to ESL students because they provide content and management for learning both inside and outside the classroom. However, it remains unclear how useful the textbooks are for bridging the academic gaps and deficiencies of ESL learners. Avineri et al. indicated that factors such as language patterns of parents and poverty can impede students' learning of the higher order pedagogical knowledge. Avineri et al. questioned suggested that involving ESL learners in more culturally and linguistically informed approaches may enhance student motivation and understanding in learning grammar and language.

Teacher Preparation

Teachers need to experience success and see their students' progress. One of the keys is to create relevancy in teacher education programs. Given the growing number of ELL students in U.S. schools, it is especially imperative that resources are available to prepare mainstream teachers to work with such students in their classrooms (Song & Samimy, 2015). In order to enhance ESL academic achievement, teachers must change

beliefs about content regarding language learning. The goal is to teach content and prepare students to be successful in the classroom. If the teacher is knowledgeable, thoughtful, and models content during instruction, the lesson is more meaningful to the student and learning will take place.

According to Song and Samimy (2015), focusing on teacher education programs is essential in overcoming different perspectives toward ESL learning. Connecting effective teacher beliefs to language learning and content addresses some of the issues with teaching ESL students by changing the way one thinks in the classroom, teachers can have the greatest impact on ESL students. Adequate training for teachers offers students an opportunity to learn, show improvement, make positive choices, and feel successful. Enhancing teacher training and motivation through the implementation of effective professional development has been proven to be a successful solution that increases student achievement. Cardinali et al. (2015) found that cultural and linguistic diversity in U.S. elementary and secondary schools will continue to grow over the next few decades. As such, an integral model for training should be implemented among elementary and secondary teachers to provide unique skills for improving teaching and support of ESL students.

Mascareno et al. (2016) concluded that the response to intervention model of education helps educators to attend to the overall quality of a student's learning experience. ELL/ESL students need continual monitoring so it is critical that teachers pay close attention to the overall experience of their students to be prepared to support, modify, and tailor delivery of lessons to their students. In essence, the response to

intervention formalizes what effective teachers in all subject areas have always done, reflect and assess their practice in order to modify and improve their instructional delivery.

Standardized Testing

Sugimoto (2017) stated that when teachers plan their lessons, they usually have certain objectives in mind. The objectives may highlight the content that will be taught or what students will learn by the end of the lesson. On the other hand, after surveying the teachers they found that the survey of teachers showed that most did not feel cultural awareness training was beneficial to their instruction of ELLs. Again, teacher apathy limited the value of professional development in this regard. The research results showed how professional development as a strategy is a contested issue overall.

Multiple sources cited the importance of collaboration among ELL students and native speakers as a mode for language acquisition. Case (2015) found that students interacted and communicated "often in a creative, situated, and multidirectional process" (p.12) when asked to collaborate. This collaboration between ELL students and their non-ELL peers promoted a dynamic learning experience for these students. Evans and Boucher (2015) posited that the goal of student autonomy is not easily reached. The teacher has an important role in helping students achieve autonomy. In order to help students to become autonomous, Evans and Boucher suggested that choice plays a critical role in students' intrinsic motivation for learning. By providing meaningful choice in the context of classroom activities, teachers can support students' autonomy and foster deep and prolonged engagement in learning. In order for choice to be motivating, options

should be relevant, meaningful, competence-enhancing and provided at the right time. As with any other activity or program, the teacher is actively involved in choosing and assigning the most appropriate activities for students to choose from in order to help them reach their language learning goals and to promote learner autonomy.

Khalil and Elkhider (2016) provided an overview of strategies for effective instruction. This overview offered an instructional approach when guided reading and other strategies are not working. Khalil and Elkhider described the findings of teachers as they searched for ways to improve their instruction. This was done by participating in coaching labs and reversing private teaching into public practice, which means teachers can be owners of professional practice or employed by a private business providing contractual instructional services to schools and parents. The use of a variety of instructional strategies in the classroom was used to develop classrooms environments that are more student-focused, promote academic achievement, and deliver positive outcomes.

Current pressures on teachers to improve student achievement continue to rise and teachers everywhere are searching for ways to support students as they learn to become proficient readers (Khalil & Elkhider, 2016). This takes time for research and planning to ensure that teaching and learning for students occurs in a way that is understandable and prepares them to be productive, responsible citizens. Educators focusing on student behaviors over skills and the power of language in order to influence instruction are the strategies and practices to promote learning in the classroom that can be used as a starting point to the development of critical thinking, problem solving and performance. Applying

these strategies and practices offers alternatives for guided readings and promotes reading success.

Day et al. (2016) conducted a study on the impact of leadership on student outcomes and strategies to improve motivation. Day et al. determined that motivation is an important factor that educators can use as a target to improve learning. The key components are: student, teacher, content, method/process, and the environment. All of these components play a part in motivating students. Using these strategies to improve motivation helps students and improves their learning. Educators should be cognizant in regard to motivation and performance. Schools that focus on strategies to motivate their students have high achievement outcomes.

Researchers collectively agreed that there is clearly a learning gap and achievement disparities between native English speaker and non-native English speakers in terms of performance, interpretation of texts, and reading comprehension skills. Several studies suggest that educators and other stakeholders have to unify to continue to evaluate the issues for ESL/ELL students in order to accomplish the task of utilizing the best possible practices and teaching techniques so the students achieve the best possible results in classroom achievement, testing requirements, graduation outcomes, and lifelong skills.

Implications

The findings may assist teachers in helping ESL students meet state academic standards. Possible project deliverables could include the implementation of a training professional development (PD) program for ESL teachers on teaching strategies to help

ESL students graduate from high school. Implications for creating positive social change include PD opportunities for teachers to address the needs of ESL students. PD would help teachers with best practices and teaching strategies.

Summary

ESL students are experiencing lower than expected standardized testing scores according to expectations set forth by the state DOE and the local school district. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students. A review of the progress of the ESL population was necessary in order to document their academic experience and to assess academic gaps, struggles, and deficiencies. The secondary intent was to explore proven and effective methods to assist students with improving their proficiency with decoding written text. A thorough understanding of best practices for the teachers that interact with ESL/ELL students on a daily basis was necessary. Research can help to discover strategies to help to reduce the number of ESL students who experience reading and testing deficiencies. In Section 2, the research methodology is presented.

Section 2: The Methodology

In the local school district under study, ESL students are experiencing lower than expected standardized testing scores according to expectations set forth by the state DOE. The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, case study was to explore the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students. In Section 2, I present the methodology for this study, justify the research design, and the selection of the participants, and discuss my role as a researcher and the procedures regarding credibility for this project.

Research Design and Approach

According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which the researcher knows the variables that need to be explored. Qualitative research is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit (Yazan, 2015). In qualitative research, the literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study and the researcher wants to learn more from the participants through exploration.

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research can help the researcher focus on the problem and find information that is most relevant to the problem. This helps to establish facts to aid with decision making and other factors to help improve a problem. Qualitative methods can be used to obtain details about the phenomenon under study, such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions, that are too complex to learn through other conventional methods (Creswell, 2015). Yin (2016) and Creswell (2015) acknowledged the value of collecting, integrating, and presenting data from a variety of

sources of evidence in any part of a study. In qualitative research, there are a variety of

features at each stage of the research process (Creswell, 2015). Tuval-Mashiach (2017)

explored the importance of transparency in qualitative research, explaining that each case

of qualitative research of a single process requires the researcher to craft their own

method or make changes in accordance with the problem. Furthermore, being transparent

in qualitative research is an important component in creating best practices. This finding

is aligned with the perspectives of Creswell and Yin who stated that the main focus of a

study should be clarifying why a problem exists and gaining insight on the contributing

factors. A quantitative approach is more restrictive to the analysis of statistics and the

numerical components of information, while qualitative research provides an opportunity

to explore a problem by observing and interviewing the participants in their natural

environments (Creswell, 2015). By participating in the interviews and observations, the

participants were able to provide me with detailed information about the reality of

teaching ESL students.

      Creswell (2015) presented five qualitative designs: (a) ethnography, (b)

phenomenology, (c) narrative inquiry, (d) grounded theory, and (e) case study.

Ethnography was not an appropriate design because an entire cultural group was not the

focus for this study (see Creswell, 2015). Only ESL teachers and administrators were

selected to participate in this study. I did not use the grounded theory design because it

involves continual comparisons of data in order to build a theory, which was not the

intent of this study (see Creswell, 2015). This study did not call for the constant

comparison of data; therefore, typologies were developed based on information obtained

from student data reports, interviews, and observations that were conducted. A

phenomenological study was not the most suitable design for this study because it

requires the researcher to study the topic for a long period of time in order to develop

patterns and relationships of meaning (see Creswell, 2015). Because time was limited, no

definitive patterns could be tracked for definite and concrete factors leading to the

academic struggles of ESL students in the study site who failed to meet AYP. Among the

research designs rejected for this study, the narrative approach was the closest fit. The

narrative design is similar to the case study design in that the participants' stories about

their individual experiences are collected; however, in narrative research these stories are

presented in chronological order, which is not necessary in case studies (Yin, 2016). The

narrative design mainly deals with personal stories, and case studies deal with in-depth,

investigative stories.

Case study researchers may focus on a program, event, or activity involving

individuals versus a group (Creswell, 2015). Merriam (2009) adopted Yin's (2016) view

that case study is a research design that is "particularly suited to situations in which it is

impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context" (p. 29). A case

study could be conducted by different disciplinary types, such as from an ethnographic,

historical, psychological, and/or sociological perspective, and by its overall intents being

descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative.

Yazan (2015) described case study research as an empirical inquiry that

investigates the case or cases conforming to a contemporary phenomenon within its real-

life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not

clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context by addressing

the how or why questions concerning the phenomenon of interest. Creswell (2015)

explained that by using the case study design, the researcher can gain an understanding of

the particular problem or phenomenon chosen to research.

Participants

An urban high school in a metropolitan area of the southern United States was the

setting for this study. The school district serves the city as well as unincorporated areas of

the county and is the largest school district in the state with over 149,000 students in

Grades K–12. The local high school had 60 teachers of which 10 taught ESL. The local

high school also had three administrators and 10 support staff.

I used purposeful sampling to select the participants. According to Creswell

(2015), purposeful sampling is the sampling procedure most often used in qualitative

research. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to explore and identify key

informants who have specific knowledge about the topic being investigated. The

selection criteria for the participants were as follows:

- ESL teachers,

- Who interacted with ESL students on a daily basis,

- had been teaching at the research site for at least 2 years, and

- were state certified.

Gaining Access to the Participants

I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (#11-11-19-0065670) from

Walden University before collecting any data. IRB guidelines and procedures were

followed over the course of the study. I hand delivered a letter of cooperation to the

school principal requesting approval to conduct the study, which they granted (see

Appendix D).

I obtained access to the participants after receiving IRB approval. I received 10

returned signed consent forms from the participants. All the 10 participants met the

selection criteria and comprised the sample of participants in this study.

Researcher–Participant Working Relationship

I established a good researcher–participant working relationship by guaranteeing

the participants their anonymity. Identifiable information was not disclosed to

administrators at the study site. I approached the participants in a professional manner

and explained to each of them that their participation was voluntary.

Ethical Protection of the Participants

I am a novice researcher. I performed the role of the researcher in this study with

professionalism and respect. The ethical requirements of conducting human research

were complied with during this study, specifically by following an interview protocol and

asking the same questions in each interview.

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Data Collection

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I obtained access to the participants from the school administrator responsible for

IRB at the study site. The participants for this study were identified with the help of the

school administrator who knows the ESL teachers who had been teaching at the local

high school for at least 2 years, were state certified, and taught ESL students. The goal

was to receive 10 returned, signed consent forms for a total participant sample of 10 ESL teachers who met the selection criteria and agreed to participate in the study.

My aim with this study was to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon, which was to understand the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students and the challenges that hinder their progress. I sought a deeper understanding of a phenomenon through explanatory questions (see Appendices B and C). The letter of cooperation sent to the school principal contained information regarding the purpose of the study, data collection, and an overview of the project study. After I obtained IRB approval from the school district, the principal signed a letter on the school's letterhead giving me permission to conduct the study. The principal allowed me to talk to the teachers after their staff meeting in order for me to read aloud and distribute the aforementioned documents and ask them to return a signed consent form to me via email. I provided each participant who returned their consent form with a formal letter that included the purpose of the study, a scheduled time for each interview that was agreed upon with each participant, and a statement that their participation was voluntary. I respected every participant and thanked them for their time, commitment, and participation in the study.

Ten participants returned their signed consent forms. I then requested access to the next staff meeting from the school administrator in order to seek more participation in the study. I repeated this process until I got a sufficient sample. When participants shared with me the same responses over and over and no new information was gleaned from the interviews, I knew saturation had been reached. I had interviewed all 10 participants data

saturation was reached. Data collection consisted of 10 interviews and five classroom observations in Grades 9 through 12 in the local high school.

Research Log and Reflective Journal

During the interviews, I kept a research log and a reflective journal. I used both to document my thoughts and ideas during each interview. The reflective journal was used during the data analysis and to interpret the interview transcripts, while the research log was used to keep track of the interviews and the time for each interview.

Role of the Researcher

I did not know the participants and held no supervisory role over them. My goal was to make each participant feel comfortable sharing their responses to the interview questions (see Appendix B). Prior to the interviews, I assured the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty or consequence for not participating. They were also reminded that notes would be taken during the interview. I maintained eye contact with the participants and monitored my nonverbal body language throughout the interviews.

I have been an educator for over 15 years. I am familiar with ESL teaching and ESL students, having taught ESL students. My position as an educator was beneficial because I understood the experiences of the participants without having any prior discussions pertaining to ESL students. I have a bachelor's degree in education from Arkansas State University and a master's degree in educational leadership from Walden University. I was a doctoral candidate at Walden University when I conducted the interviews.

Data Analysis

This qualitative case study explored how teachers and administrators perceive the factors that might contribute to low standardized test scores, how they perceive the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students, and how they perceive the challenges that teachers and administrators face which might hinder the progress of ESL students in the study site. The responses showed that the level of success achieved by ESL students are on standardized test and in the classroom depends on the strategies and methods teachers implement, support in primary classroom, training provided to ESL teachers, parental involvement, and learning abilities of ESL students. An effort was made to seek the ESL teacher's view of ESL instruction failures and successes. Information was gathered through one-on-one interviews with ESL teachers, English teachers, as well as descriptive student data provided to the school by the district and is accessible to the public.

The interviews were scheduled and set up ahead of time. Permission from both the teachers and the school administrator was obtained before interviews were conducted. All interviews were digitally recorded and converted into a text document. After being transcribed, copies were given to the participants to check for accuracy and allow changes if necessary. Interview transcripts and results are stored in a locked file cabinet and on a computer. Computerized information is stored in password protected data files. All recorded interviews were used in such a manner that identification was not compromised and or personal harm was not done. The confidentiality of the participants

was maintained by substituting names with the title "teacher" and a unique number 1-10 on observation and interview protocol forms (see Appendix B).

An expert validation was conducted to identify issues and give suggestions to add, delete, or change the interview questions. Three members from the Walden University faculty were selected to perform the expert validation and they provided information that refined or improved the interview questions. A pilot test was conducted by asking a subset of the sample interview questions (see Appendices B and C).

Non-participant observations, in which the teacher is observed in the classroom while the observer take notes, were conducted on all of the participants in the study. Each teacher was observed in their natural classroom environment during regular school hours (see Appendix C). Permission from both the teacher and the administrator was established before observations are conducted. Observations consisted of the observer showing up to the classroom and taking detailed notes on what is seen as it relates to instruction and strategies used. The observations were 30 minutes in length and provided the observer an opportunity for a closer look at the teacher and student interactions and strategies used (see Appendix B).

Documents can be a valuable source of information in qualitative research (Creswell, 2015). Data from the AYP report and test scores were reviewed and used to reading deficiencies among ESL students. The data were public and protected in the same manner as the interviews and observations.

In this study, data from interviews and observations were reviewed using a typological analysis. The typology analysis involved summarizing and breaking down the

information from field notes taken during observations, interviews, and AYP data reports. This allowed categorization of the data to make it sensible (Kozleski, 2017). Typologies are generated from theory, common sense and research objectives; initial data processing happens within those typological groupings (Kozleski, 2017). Yin (2016) stated that data analysis and interpretation coincide and contribute to deep insights. Kozleski (2017) explained that qualitative researchers can adapt their individual projects. Kozleski's nine steps in typological analysis include a) identify typologies to be analyzed, b) read the data, marking entries related to your typologies, c) read entries by typology, recording the main ideas in entries on a summary sheet, d) look for patterns, relationships, themes within typologies, e) read data, coding entries according to patterns identified and keeping a record of what entries go with what elements of your pattern, f) decide if your patterns are supported by the data, and search the data for non-examples of your patterns, g) look for relationships among the patterns identified, h) write your patterns as one-sentence generalizations, and i) select data excerpts that support your generalizations.

Member checking and triangulation was used to conclude interviews and ensure accuracy by establishing credibility of information collected (Creswell, 2015). Member checking was done by allowing teachers interviewed to check the interpreted data collected during the recorded interview for accuracy. Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check for accuracy of the account and help establish credibility (Creswell, 2015) and this mode of data collection establishes credibility and reliability. A list of questions was asked in the

interviews with each teacher (see Appendix B). Triangulation assisted in transferring evidence from observations into typologies to develop a report.

Research Accuracy and Credibility

I conducted member checking after the interviews. I ensured accuracy of the findings by establishing credibility (Creswell, 2015). I met with the participants to check the interview transcripts. Specifically, I conducted member checking to check the interpreted interview data collected during the recorded interviews for accuracy. As a novice researcher, I asked the participants to check for accuracy of the interview transcripts to establish credibility (Creswell, 2015). I used an interview protocol for the interviews. I explained to the participants my role in conducting this study. I also explained to the participants that their participation was voluntary. I compared, contrasted, and verified the findings by using the literature review. I used triangulation by collecting evidence from multiple sources such as interviews with multiple participants. Thus, I established credibility, reflexivity, and reliability.

Discrepant Cases

I found no discrepant cases within the interview data. Discrepant cases are contradictory to an emerging theme (Creswell, 2015). I searched for discrepant cases during the data analysis. I have no discrepant cases to report because during the data analysis no additional codes were needed.

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Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

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The study site was one public school district. The scope of this project study was one high school. This study was qualitative and I was the primary instrument of data

collection. I assumed that the participants shared their responses openly and honestly.

This study was limited by the experiences of the ESL teachers and the small sample

representing only ESL teachers. The findings may not apply to other high schools within

the school district, which binds this study.

Research Question

The following research question was addressed:

What challenges do teachers perceive are contributing to low standardized test

scores by ESL students**?**

Findings

I analyzed the interview transcripts using thematic analysis. Themes emerged

(Table 2). The findings are presented and interview excerpts are included.

Table 2

Themes

Theme	Description of Theme
ESL teacher role	How ESL teachers view ESL students in regular classrooms
English proficiency assessment and monitoring	Strategies used for assessments and monitoring of English proficiency for ESL students
ESL programs and instruction for ESL students	Methods of instruction to ESL students
Learning ability effects on second language acquisition (SLA)	ESL teachers view of learning abilities and its role when learning a second language
Parental involvement and ESL student success	Existing parental involvement and understanding its connection to ESL student success
Influence of social status and culture on ESL students	Understanding the role socioeconomic status plays on ESL student learning
General views of ESL program	General views ESL teachers have towards the ESL program that include district support, resources, instruction, theories and other comments related to ESL program.

Theme #1: ESL Teacher Role

The ESL teachers collectively agreed that their role has changed from being just a teacher to taking on other duties such as testing coordinators, mentors, facilitators, counselors and other roles over the years largely due to the increase in ESL student enrollment and district requirements. Five out of the 10 teachers interviewed stated that they frequently have to manage circumstances that traditionally are assigned to be addressed by social workers. For example, Teacher 1 assisted ESL students and their families with getting resources from local agencies that provide financial, employment, health, and mental health assistance.

Teacher 2 stated that her main responsibility is to coordinate and monitor ESL students learning progress in their English classes. In addition, Teacher 2 conducted meetings with ESL teachers, is a liaison for parents, tracks attendance, and facilitates parent meetings that covers topics such as, discipline, the importance of school and graduation, and the impact education has on their child's future. Teacher 2 also submitted referrals for other academic and social needs of ESL students and their families.

Teacher 3 stated that her role as an ESL teacher extended beyond the classroom. She offers sessions after school to give her students supplemental help and support to be successful in their daily lives. She assists students with completing applications for jobs and college. Teacher 3 stated that if the basic needs of students are not met, they cannot learn adequately, therefore, it is important to provide support and remove barriers. ESL teachers view their role as involving a wide range of activities that have broadened the scope their scope and requires them to react to circumstances from academia to social to

financial needs. All ESL teachers stated that the needs of ESL students present many

challenges for them when developing and implementing ESL curriculum. In addition to

dealing with students' socio-economic circumstances, such as housing and transportation,

teachers are confronted with managing the complexity of the varied learning abilities and

English proficiency levels of ESL students. This spectrum of academic competence is

especially noteworthy when ESL teachers are responsible for assigning ESL students to

regular classrooms, which is current national trend (De Jong & Naranjo, 2019), and

present challenges for ESL students when it comes to of English language acquisition and

for teachers with regard to appropriate classroom placement. Thus, Theme #1 was that

the ESL teachers' role has changed to include other duties such as testing coordinators,

mentors, facilitators, counselor, and other roles over the years largely due to the increase

in ESL student enrollment and district requirements.

Theme #2: English Proficiency Assessment and Monitoring

The ESL teachers who participated in this study described using the same process

to identify ESL students and monitor their progress. All of the participants stated that

students are identified for enrollment in the ESL program through the completion of the

home language survey that is similar in public schools. When asked about for their

primary language, if they answer with any other language than English, they are given the

assessment. The test assigns a level of English proficiency from 1 to 6. All students

testing with a proficiency level between 1 through 4.0 or less than 4.5 are eligible for

ESL services. Level 4.5 or higher indicates that the student does not require ESL

assistance; however, if the primary language is not English the student is placed on a

monitored (M) status. Students scoring levels 1 through 5 are placed in ESL classes and

receive various amounts of ESL services accordingly. Level 6 students are monitored by

an ESL teacher for a period of 2 years. If the student falls behind academically and/or

request assistance during the monitoring period, the school provides ESL services.

When ESL students transfer from another school district, the ACCESS test scores

are used for placement at the receiving school. If a student transfers from a state that does

not use the ACCESS test, the student must take the ACCESS test for ESL services and

placement and other scores cannot be used by proxy. ESL student progress is also

monitored and measured by the ACCESS test which is given to all ESL students during

the spring semester of the school year. All of the ESL teacher participants stated that a

student is considered to have progressed if they move up at least one level of proficiency

from spring of one school year to spring of the following school year. In addition, during

the school year progress is measured with formative assessments, teacher-developed

daily and weekly checklists, class grades, and comments from the teacher.

During the interviews, all of the participants reported not having an established

curriculum for ESL instruction. The following quotes detail the concern with regard to

ESL program delivery and instruction: Teacher 2 stated, "ESL students should have their

own curriculum, tailored to help them improve as learners. I think ESL students should

absolutely be given the opportunity to learn and grow alongside their other peers in other

subjects though." Teacher 1 stated, "The ESL teachers have developed a variety of

lessons using ESL books alternating the resources at different times. Over the years ESL

teachers have created their own materials." Teacher 3 said, "The ESL program is often

revamped with every new teacher that joins our school district because there is no

continuance among staff which leads to no continuance in instruction." Teacher 4

reported, "It is a natural progression and some students belong in an English classroom."

All of the participants also referred to some of the textbooks that are used to develop ESL

programs, instruction, and strategies. A list of books that the local school district is still

using is included:

- *English Language Learners: Teaching strategies that Work* (Gilakjani &

  Sabouri, 2017)

- *Strategies for Success with English Language learners* (Zheng et al., 2018)

- *The ESL/ELL Teacher's Survival Guide: Ready to use strategies, Tools, and*

  Activities for Teaching English Language Learners of all Levels (Tejado &

  Lucido, 2019)

- *Unlocking English Language Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making*

  Content Accessible (Fenner & Snyder, 2017)

- *Fifty Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners* (Herrell & Jordan,

  2015)

- *How to Reach and Teach English Language Learners Practical Strategies to*

  ensure Success (Farrell & Jacobs, 2020)

All of the participants confirmed that a standardized curriculum had not been

established or adopted at the school for ESL instruction. There was consensus among

them that the DOE does not mandate a specific curriculum or provide ample resources for

ESL instruction. Teachers are left to cultivate their own resources as long as the content

is focused on the language content areas with emphasis on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. All of the participants also indicted that local DOE informed schools that they must comply with Title III and provide ESL programs accordingly, but does not provide direction on using a specific bilingual program, dual-immersion program, or any other particular ESL program model.

As long as the ESL program is validated by experts in the field, it meets the requirements (DOE, 2018). To that end, they meet regularly to gather and create their own materials for instruction and the have developed a program that offers inclusion classes, sheltered, self-contained and content-based ESL classes. Sheltered instruction is the method for delivering content knowledge in a way that allows both concepts and academic English proficiency to be enhanced (Markos & Himmel, 2016). This approach engages ELL students in attaining grade-level content-area knowledge and improved English proficiency. More specifically, in sheltered English classes clear, succinct and simple language and a variety of scaffolding strategies are used to communicate didactic content to students in a meaningful way.

Inclusion classes are content-based classes co-taught by a regular teacher and an ESL teacher. With this model the co-teacher may work with students at their individual seats or in a small group within the regular classroom. The co-teacher may assist students with same lesson as the remainder of the class or modify the lesson like providing aids for comprehension (i.e., pictures or keywords).

Teacher 4 stated, "Our inclusion program is based off of the special education model for the district and it works in a way that the ESL teacher ensures ESL students

receive accommodations according to their level of English proficiency." Teacher 4 also stated, "These accommodations are used in daily teaching activities and for testing." Teacher 5 stated, "We push the issue of a co-teaching model, so the ESL teacher can provide opportunities for scaffolding, and build on what they already know." Teacher 6 said, "In inclusion classes where we co-teach, the ESL teacher takes the activities planned by the regular teacher and make the activities understandable for ESL students."

Scaffolding was a term referenced by all ESL teachers throughout the interviews, specifically when talking about ESL programs and instruction. Scaffolding is a guidance used by teachers to help students reach their learning potential by dividing learning into smaller sections and providing tools or structure to complement each section (Kamil, 2017). An example would be to provide background knowledge or reviewing crucial vocabulary before and after the lesson. One of the ESL teacher stated that she scaffolds learning by encouraging students to identify their own errors through methods such as pinpointing the error with a highlighter.

The ESL teachers demonstrated dedication to ESL student success by taking unrequired measures to ensure that ESL students receive the support need to exceed expectations. Most of them stated that ESL students have academic difficulties and/or are falling behind due to English language deficiency. As the ESL teacher, they work with the student and provide remediation before and after school or during nonacademic parts of the day. Thus, all of the participants described using the same process to identify ESL students and monitor their progress. Specifically, all of the participants stated that

students are identified for enrollment in the ESL program through the completion of the

home language survey that is similar in public schools.

Theme #3: ESL Programs and Instruction for ESL Students

One of the major decisions in the field of teaching ESL students is determining

which program of instruction is the most beneficial to use. ESL programs consist of a

student population that represents students from many different countries and they speak

many different languages. The ESL program accommodates students from different

language backgrounds in the same class, and the teachers do not need to be proficient in

the home language(s) of their students. The teachers described this program as being

mostly mainstreamed in a regular classroom and the ESL students are assisted with a

pull-out teacher in order to receive instruction in English. The students are also placed in

a content-based ESL classroom to assist with their English development. In these

classrooms, ESL teachers share the goal of teaching ESL students both English language

and academic content. The teachers use a variety of strategies – such as the use of

gestures, visual aids, and simplified English – so that students can access content.

All of the participants agreed that their ESL program and instruction is tailored

for their ESL students. The program includes text from all around the world and universal

values and ideals that many students can relate too. Furthermore, all of the participants

mentioned that an improved curriculum would have more opportunities for students to

describe and express themselves, their background and perspectives.

Teacher 7 stated, "Learning academic vocabulary-teaching how to read the

question for clarity and find the answers. Learning how to write with structure using the

ACE model in some instances with paragraph writing are some of the instructional methods." According to Blodgett and Lanigan (2018), understanding and responding to a child's ACE profile might be an important strategy for improving the academic path of at-risk children. It also helps to identify which at-risks factors that need to be addressed that affects their academic path (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018).

Teacher 8 stated, "Annotated questions and text have been helpful in ensuring the success of her students." Students understand what is happening in the text after they read it. Annotating means you are doing the hard work while you read, and it allows the student to reference their previous work and have a clear point to start work in the future. Teacher 9 stated, "Test taking skills such as time management skills, process of elimination and making references are successful strategies that help with standardized testing." Thus, all of the participants agreed that their ESL program and instruction is tailored for their ESL students and that an improved curriculum would have more opportunities for students to describe and express themselves, their background and perspectives.

Theme #4: Learning Ability Effects on Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

All of the participants believed that native language proficiency plays a positive role when acquiring and learning a second language. Teacher 3 stated, "ESL students have the ability to learn, it takes more time." She stated that their native language plays an important role in learning a second language. Teacher 3 also stated, "Students who have a strong foundation in their native language will move through the process of learning a second language and their proficiency expectations will be reached quicker."

Teacher 3 concluded, "This is successfully achieved because their first language ability gives them a cognitive advantage and they can transfer more language materials."

Teacher 8 stated, "Native language is very important! ESL teachers should support the continuation of native language. ESL students are not native readers, and getting them excited about reading in their own language may be easier and a form of motivation." Teacher 8 stated, "ESL teachers teaching them to decode, sound out words, and identifying them allows content to be transferred into their second language." Teacher 6 stated, "Students should be motivated to be their best and native language helps ESL students with their identity as well as their self-esteem. We use words to connect language."

Teacher 9 stated, "Through her years of teaching, ESL students who are strong in their native language seem to learn the second language faster." Teacher 9 stated, "Parents are encouraged to speak their native language at home so that ESL students do not forget their native language. The goal for the students is to learn a second language and become bilingual." Content knowledge and literacy that is gained from primary language, also provide support to create more high functioning classrooms. It also provides insights and recommendations for language teachers to help ESL students acquire a second language. Thus, all of the participants believed that native language proficiency plays a positive role when acquiring and learning a second language.

Theme #5: Parental Involvement and ESL Student Success

All of the participants reported that parental involvement plays a major role in the success of all students. When parents of ESL students are involved with school and they

understand the ESL program, they can provide support at home for student success. It also encourages learning and it helps students to understand the importance of education and learn to enjoy learning. Teacher 2 stated, "Parental involvement is one of the most difficult tasks we do. The language barriers and cultures are different, ESL parents tend to leave school matters to school." Teacher 2 stated, "It is also difficult to get them engaged when they are afraid because they are fearful of being reported because they are undocumented." Teacher 3 stated, "Parental involvement is critical to any student's success. However, parental involvement is dependent on a number of factors including immigration, employment, wages, class disparity and factors." Teacher 3 stated, "As teachers, we have the responsibility to motivate students to do their best, even if parental involvement may not be a major factor. It is also important for the school to offer classes to support and encourage parental involvement."

Teacher 6 stated, "It will help students if parents are involved but it will not be easy if the parent doesn't speak English." Teacher 9 stated, "Parental involvement is essential. Parents need to come to all of the meetings the school offer. They need to meet with the teachers and have a real presence at the school." Teacher 9 stated, "Curriculum is somewhat suitable. Our 9th and 11th grade curriculum follow the same curriculum and English I. Our 10th and 12th grade curriculum follow the same curriculum and English II in order to support our EL's taking the courses." Teacher 9 stated, "Our ELD course help with the basic skills needed for learning the languge. Students must qualify for ELD." Thus, all of the participants reported that parental involvement plays a major role in the success of all students.

Theme #6: Influence of Social Status and Culture on ESL Students

All of the 10 participants talked about economic status, legal status, college, and financial aid eligibility, family view of education, family culture, school attendance and work, and teenage pregnancy relative to ESL students. Teacher 1 stated, "The economic status of some ESL students creates a situation of low self-esteem, and limits access to certain elements that are important for the life of a student." Teacher 1 also stated, "For example, situations in which students who cannot have drivers' licenses and do not have college access due to their economic and/or legal status. Teacher 1 reported that "students either do not qualify for financial aid or do not qualify for in-state status, and this can lead to disinterest in continuing education."

Teacher 2 stated, "ESL students are prime targets for those social problems that affect today's adolescents such as drugs, crimes, and pregnancy." Teacher 3 stated, "ESL legal status affects instruction in an in direct way. They may think they cannot get into college, and some students may be interested in the military but not eligible." Teacher 3 also stated, "So, they may ask themselves why they even need education. Also, their families may not value education."

Teacher 4 stated, "I have seen kids be successful despite legal and economic challenges. I think it is an individual persistence and culture." Teacher 5 stated, "Low socio-economic status affects ESL students the same as other students. However, parental attitudes and involvement can influence student learning and student outcomes in a positive way." Teacher 6 stated, "I believe that the culture of a school plays a big role in the success of ESL students." Teacher 6 also stated, "Our school is supportive of ESL

students, and provides academic support as well as opportunities for extracurricular activities." Teacher 7 stated: "The manner in which low socio-economic status affects ESL is no different than others students. At risk student populations face similar difficulties and struggles. It is important for teachers to understand the culture of their students."

These findings are in line with the following: The language spoken by mothers and children and the frequency of mother-child reading at home influenced children's language abilities (Lewis et al., 2016). It is very important that teachers of ESL students be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of ESL students in order for them to be successful. According to Bikowki and Gui (2017), in order to fully embrace a commitment to education and the social and cultural components of literacy development, an educator has to become fully aware of the understandings that students are bringing with them based on their background. This background information involves assessing their academic skills as well as learning about their family, the cultural and social customs that are an essential part of the child's life. When an interest is shown in a student's culture and language it makes them feel cared for and welcomed.

Theme #7: General Views of ESL Program

The responses below are general responses about different aspects of ESL instruction, theories, support, resources, programs, and other comments related to the ESL program. Teacher 1 stated, "Through my years of working with ESL students with low English proficiency, they do better when they work in groups and also when the text is broken down in smaller portions." Teacher 2 stated, "I have been working in education

for fifteen years. Working with ESL students and their families have expanded my understanding of the challenges that they face on a day-to-day basis." Teacher 2 also stated, "Being aware of these challenges now I try to focus on their strengths and use it to bridge the gap from the known to the unknown."

Teacher 3 stated, "Cummins threshold theory is rational. This theory primarily states that students should not be forced to do something that they are not equipped for, but that is what education today is requiring ESL students to do." Teacher 3 stated, "ESL students are being tested and they are not prepared to be tested. School personnel are scarce. Schools have limited time due to graduation and ESL students are placed in regular English classes before they are ready." Teacher 4 stated, "When teaching ESL students, I like the idea of Krashen that the most favorable way a language is learned is through natural communication." Teacher 4 stated, "It provides opportunities for students to improve their memory, problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, enhance their concentration, ability to multitask, and better listening skills."

Teacher 5 stated, "I like Vygotsky's interactionist theory encourages student to experiment with language and learn it is okay to make mistakes they will be able to discover for themselves how to combine words and phrases to make complete sentences and communicate." Teacher 5 stated, "This helps to build and support learning experiences in many ways." Teacher 6 stated, "Skinner's behaviorism comes to mind when I think of ESL students. When learning a language other than their primary language, students like to be encouraged for reaching certain goals."

Conclusion

The findings of this study are based on face-to-face interviews with 10 ESL high school teachers. In the ESL teachers' view, the ESL program is a good foundation, but more is needed for students to be successful. All of the participants described their program as a good starting point that assist with planning for student learning. ESL students first complete a student profile form with the student's personal data, language background, and educational history upon enrollment. The home language survey is also completed during this process. Next, students are assessed for English language proficiency and enrolled in the proper ESL classes. The role of the ESL teacher consists of more than just teaching English language and academics. As the years past, ESL teacher's role has changed as they have to assist students with other issues that they face daily, which require them to be social workers, case managers and whatever else is needed to assist the students. Having to complete all these tasks equips students with necessary skills and academic knowledge for success. ESL teachers' views were supported with research literature indicated earlier in the study.

All ESL teachers have the same views of the ESL program. All teachers described the program/instruction in similar ways. All of the participants reported that not having a set curriculum in place for ESL students was a concern because it changed often. ESL teachers indicated that the need for a district-wide curriculum is needed so that it would not change every time someone new takes over the department. The high school offers the following classes for ESL students: inclusion classes, sheltered classes, self-contained, and content-based ESL classes. The ESL teachers believe that parental

involvement plays an important role in an ESL students' education but is hard to obtain. The overall assessment of the ESL program was aligned when considering issues such as instruction, ESL students learning culture and policy.

Overall, all of the participants felt the relationship between understanding the strategies for ESL students and the length of time in the ESL program is critical. All of the participants agreed that without proper strategies in place for ESL students, it takes much longer for them to learn the literature. Meaning that when ESL students first enroll in the district it will take them longer than 4 years to graduate.

All of the participants supported the ESL program. Also, all of the participants committed to the success of ESL students was evidenced by their continuing efforts to research new ideas and ways to improve the learning experiences for ESL students. The participants adjusted classroom instruction to accommodate ESL learners. All of the participants provided extra support before and after school to ESL students that needed it. In this section, I described the research methodology. I also presented the data collection and analysis processes. I conducted interviews. In Section 3, I present the project.

Section 3: The Project

In the local school district under study, ESL students are experiencing lower than expected standardized testing scores according to expectations set forth by the state DOE and school standards. The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, case study was to understand the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students and the challenges that hinder their progress. In this section, I describe the project (see Appendix A) and the rationale for its development.

Project Description and Goals

All the participants reported that not having a set curriculum in place for ESL students was a concern and that there was a need for a district-wide curriculum for ESL students. All the participants also felt that the relationship between understanding the strategies for ESL students and the length of time that students are in the ESL program is critical.

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The success of this project will primarily depend on the support provided by the school district and ESL department personnel to provide and accommodate time and space for program implementation. The ESL department chair will make a schedule to accommodate ESL teachers who volunteer to help develop the ESL program. Additional support can be offered as well through the district's learning portal.

Potential Barriers

Quintelier et al. (2020) mentioned the importance of taking into account teachers' willingness to participate in PD, and I foresee a major barrier of this project to be ESL

teachers taking additional time to meet to setup the foundations of the PD program considering that they are full time faculty, have families, and some are enrolled in college courses in the evening. Mundschenk and Fuchs (2016) explained that professional learning committees would impact the successful implementation of any school program. I particularly considered that if the school district provides compensation for the teachers' time and attendance, their lack of participation would be reduced to a minimum.

Another barrier could be the district's lack of funds to pay outside personnel to conduct PD once it becomes a part of the program. I will look for low cost and, if possible, free workshops if funds become an issue. Alternatively, the PD could be offered online to save on other expenses.

Teacher attendees may feel they do not need to participate in the PD because they think that their teaching methods are up to date. I will explain the benefits of formally establishing PD as a mean of support for ESL teachers. Since the findings of this study will have been previously shared with ESL teachers, I expect little unwillingness to participate. Nevertheless, I will ensure that each attendee understands the benefits of creating a program to help old and new ESL teachers' stay current on trends to motivate ESL students in the classroom.

<p align="center">**Rationale**</p>

In the local high schools in the district, the majority of ESL students achieved lower standardized test scores compared to students of other demographics between the years of 2015 and 2019. In between those years, no ESL students at the study site high school scored in the proficient category. The goal for the district, per mandates

established by the state DOE, is for an increasing number of students to move toward

proficiency and beyond each year. Since 2015, the AYP for ESL students in the district

has shown a steady decline (see Table 1). Because of this consistent decline in

performance of ESL students, it is imperative that the current strategies used were

explored.

The 2019 study site DP reported that all high school students in the state must

complete 22 credits to graduate on state-mandated EOC exams. The 2019 DP

requirements align the EOC test with the local state comprehensive assessment program.

This modification requires that student performance on the EOC tests be factored into

their semester grades, with a percentage effect on their final grades in their core classes.

According to the state DOE, in the instance that a student is already performing at below

proficient levels in a core class and scores below proficient on the EOC exam, it is

possible that the student could fail the class and not earn a diploma. Developing

competent and fair testing mechanisms has not only been a problem within the local state,

concerns have increased nationally over the last 20 years amid national and state test

score declines, unflattering international achievement comparisons, the failure of funding

increases to produce discernible results, high school dropout rates, and a perception that

school and work are insufficiently closely aligned (Pepper & Nettle, 2017).

Review of the Literature

ESL Teacher Role

The ESL teachers collectively agreed that their role has changed from being just a

teacher to taking on other duties, such as testing coordinators, mentors, facilitators,

counselors, and other roles over the years largely due to the increase in ESL student enrollment and district requirements. Five out of the 10 teachers interviewed stated that they frequently have to manage circumstances that traditionally would be assigned to social workers. For example, Teacher 1 assisted ESL students and their families with getting resources from local agencies that provide financial, employment, health, and mental health assistance.

Teacher 2 stated that her main responsibility is to coordinate and monitor ESL students' learning progress in their English classes. In addition, Teacher 2 conducted meetings with ESL teachers, is a liaison for parents, tracks attendance, and facilitates parent meetings that covers topics, such as discipline, the importance of school and graduation, and the impact education has on their child's future. Teacher 2 also submitted referrals for other academic and social needs of ESL students and their families.

Teacher 3 stated that her role as an ESL teacher extended beyond the classroom. She offers sessions after school to give her students supplemental help and support to be successful in their daily lives. For example, she assisted students with completing applications for jobs and college. Teacher 3 stated that if the basic needs of students are not met, they cannot learn adequately, so it is important to provide support and remove barriers. ESL teachers viewed their role as involving a wide range of activities that have broadened the scope their scope and requires them to react to circumstances from academia to social to financial needs. All ESL teachers stated that the needs of ESL students present many challenges for them when developing and implementing ESL curriculum. In addition to dealing with students' socio-economic circumstances, such as

housing and transportation, teachers are confronted with managing the complexity of the varied learning abilities and English proficiency levels of ESL students. This spectrum of academic competence is especially noteworthy when ESL teachers are responsible for assigning ESL students to regular classrooms, which is current national trend (see De Jong & Naranjo, 2019), and present challenges for ESL students when it comes to of English language acquisition and for teachers with regard to appropriate classroom placement.

English Proficiency Assessment and Monitoring

The local state uses ACCESS for ELL students. ACCESS is the DOE-approved English language proficiency assessment and was developed by the WIDA consortium. Currently, 40 states make up the consortium with 400 schools as members. The WIDA Standards for English Language Proficiency, along with their strands of model performance indicators representing social, instructional, and academic language, have been adopted by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) as the national model (Turner & Windle, 2019). According to the state DOE, the ACCESS for ELLs K–12 English Language Proficiency test was developed in 2005, and is based on the WIDA English language proficiency standards.

The ESL teachers who participated in this study described using the same process to identify ESL students and monitor their progress. One ESL teacher stated that students are identified for enrollment in the ESL program through the completion of the home language survey that is similarly used in other public schools. When asked about for their primary language, if students answer with any other language than English, they are

given the WIDA/ACCESS assessment. The test assigns a level of English proficiency from 1 to 6. All students testing with a proficiency level between 1 through 4.0 or less than 4.5 are eligible for ESL services. A score of Level 4.5 or higher indicates that the student does not require ESL assistance; however, if the primary language is not English the student is placed on a monitored (M) status. Students scoring levels 1 through 5 are placed in ESL classes and receive various amounts of ESL services accordingly. Level 6 (M) students are monitored by an ESL teacher for a period of 2 years. If the student falls behind academically and/or request assistance during the monitoring period, the school provides ESL services.

When ESL students transfer from another school, the ACCESS test scores are used for placement at the receiving school. If a student transfers from a state that does not use the ACCESS test, the student must take the ACCESS test for ESL services and placement; other scores cannot be used by proxy. ESL student progress is also monitored and measured by the ACCESS test that is given to all ESL students during the spring semester of the school year.

One ESL teacher stated that a student is considered to have progressed if they move up at least one level of proficiency from spring of one school year to spring of the following school year. In addition, during the school year, progress is measured with formative assessments, teacher-developed daily and weekly checklists, class grades, and comments from the teacher. During the interviews, ESL teachers reported not having an established curriculum for ESL instruction. The participants also referred to some of the textbooks that are used to develop ESL programs, instruction, and strategies. All ESL

teachers confirmed that a standardized curriculum had not been stablished or adopted at the school for ESL instruction.

Teachers are left to cultivate their own resources as long as the content is focused on the language content areas with emphasis on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They also indicted that the state DOE informed schools that they must comply with Title III and provide ESL programs accordingly but did not provide direction on using a specific bilingual program, dual-immersion program, or any other particular ESL program model. According to the DOE, as long as the ESL program is validated by experts in the field, it meets the requirements. To that end, the ESL teachers meet regularly to create their own materials for instruction and have developed a program that offers inclusion classes as well as sheltered, self-contained, and content-based ESL classes. Sheltered instruction is the method for delivering content knowledge in a way that allows both concepts and academic English proficiency to be enhanced (Markos & Himmel, 2016). This approach engages ELL students in attaining grade-level, content-area knowledge and improved English proficiency. More specifically, in sheltered English classes clear, succinct, and simple language and a variety of scaffolding strategies are used to communicate didactic content to students in a meaningful way.

Learning activities are used to relate new grade-level content instruction to students' previous knowledge while also adapting the lesson to align with student's level of English proficiency. The sheltered instruction observation protocol is increasingly used as an instructional framework to help secondary teachers support ELLs. Although there is room for improvement in its implementation, this tool is for teachers to gain the

knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to support ELL students learn subject-area

content and skills while learning English (Daniel & Colin, 2015). The optimum goal of

this approach is to deepen and broaden ESL learners' ability to use new language

concepts while they continue to improve their English language proficiency.

Inclusion classes are content-based classes cotaught by a regular teacher and an

ESL teacher. With this model, the co-teacher may work with students at their individual

seats or in a small group within the regular classroom. The co-teacher may assist students

with the same lesson as the remainder of the class or modify the lesson, such as providing

aids for comprehension (i.e., pictures or keywords).

Scaffolding was a term referenced by all ESL teachers throughout the interviews,

specifically when talking about ESL programs and instruction. Scaffolding is a guidance

used by teachers to help students reach their learning potential by dividing learning into

smaller sections and providing tools or structure to complement each section (Kamil,

2017). An example would be to provide background knowledge or reviewing crucial

vocabulary before and after the lesson. Scaffolding activities provide support for learning

and can be removed as learners are able to demonstrate strategic behaviors in their own

learning activities (Herrell & Jordan, 2016). Most of the ESL teachers spoke positively

about scaffolding, stating that it builds on what students already know and provides

students with instruction that is based on their level of proficiency.

Content-based ESL classes amalgamates language instruction with content areas

to meet the linguistic and academic needs of ELL students and can yield a meaningful

avenue to academic language acquisition (Tedick, 2018). Teachers use a variety of

instructional techniques as a way of developing second language content. One of the ESL teachers stated, "Content knowledge is imperative for ESL students to be successful once mainstreamed in regular classes."

ESL teachers should know the level of their students' English language proficiency, because it allows the teacher to work within each student's zone of proximity development (ZPD). ZPD is a theory used to determine what a student is capable of learning. ZPD refers to the difference between concept or skills the student can do without assistance and what can be accomplished with direction, encouragement, or incentive from a teacher (Smagorinsky, 2017).

Vygotsky (2017) proposed that in order for a student to learn a concept or skill, it had to be within what he called the student's ZPD, which can be described as skills that a student is near proficiency. According to Vygotsky (2017), teachers can work in a student's zone of proximal development by scaffolding language development and providing the support a student needs as he/she progresses.

The ESL teachers demonstrated dedication to ESL student success by taking unrequired measures to ensure that ESL students receive the support need to exceed expectations. Most of them stated that ESL students have academic difficulties and/or are falling behind due to English language deficiency. As the ESL teacher, they work with the student and provide remediation before and after school or during non-academic parts of the day.

ESL Programs and Instruction for ESL Students

One of the major decisions in the field of teaching ESL students is determining which program of instruction is the most beneficial to use. ESL programs in the school district consist of a student population that represents students from many different countries and they speak many different languages. The ESL program accommodates students from different language backgrounds in the same class, and the teachers do not need to be proficient in the home language(s) of their students. The teachers described this program as being mostly mainstreamed in a regular classroom and the ESL students are assisted with a pull-out teacher in order to receive instruction in English. The students are also placed in a content-based ESL classroom to assist with their English development. In these classrooms, ESL teachers share the goal of teaching ESL students both English language and academic content. The teachers use a variety of strategies such as the use of gestures, visual aids, and simplified English.

All participants agreed that their ESL program and instruction is tailored for their ESL student population. According to Li (2018), due to the rapid increase of ESL students in the classroom, more systematic and increased language support to ensure all ELL students achieve success in schools. According to Blodgett and Lanigan (2018), understanding and responding to a child's profile might be an important strategy for improving the academic path of at-risk children. ESL helps to identify at-risks factors that need to be addressed that affects their academic path (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018).

Annotating means you are doing the hard work while you read, and it allows the student to reference their previous work and have a clear point to start work in the future.

According to Schall-Leckrone (2018), using annotated text consistently improves instruction and learning opportunities and outcomes for ESL students. According to Ray (2019), learning strategies are specific techniques used to help students learn content material. The learning strategies incorporate patterns and an evidence-based practice that are intended to improve students' listening during class, effective note taking, reading content material, assignment completion, and test taking. These strategies can be used for learning academic content for students who plan to go to college.

Learning Ability Effects on SLA

Based on feedback, it is understood that most of the participants believed that native language proficiency plays a positive role when acquiring and learning a second language. The goal for the students is to learn a second language and become bilingual. Errors naturally appear in spontaneous speeches and conversations (Sato & Takatsuka, 2016). Particularly in a second or foreign language, it is only natural that mistakes happen as a part of the learning process.

After an inappropriate expression is detected, it can be corrected. This act of correcting can be initiated either by the speaker (nonnative speaker) or the recipient. This is referred to in SLA research as self-initiated self-completed repair. This process is important because it creates situations where students can self-initiate to repair their own errors and mistakes.

Many experts on second language acquisition are supporters of native language proficiency and maintenance for ESL students. Bradley (2019) stated that schools that provide students with quality education in their primary language, help learners achieve

their language goals. Content knowledge and literacy that is gained from primary

language, also provide support to create more high functioning classrooms. It also

provides insights and recommendations for language teachers to help ESL students

acquire a second language.

Parental Involvement and ESL Student Success

Parental involvement plays a major role in the success of all students. When

parents of ESL students are involved with school and they understand the ESL program,

they can provide support at home for student success. ESL also encourages learning and

it helps students to understand the importance of education and learn to enjoy learning.

Teachers and parents share similar goals regarding the students they jointly serve. Each

must, therefore, work as partners to bring together the home and school and help the

individual students learn and grow. According to Gonzales and Gabel (2017), in the

United States, parental involvement is an important part of a child's education, and

teachers often rely on parents to boost student achievement. Gonzales and Gabel (2017)

also stated that parental involvement is beneficial for student development and academic

achievement.

Parsons and Shim (2019) suggested that involving parents of ESL students is not

just the teacher's responsibility. Districts and schools have to develop comprehensive

plans for parent and community involvement that include the parents of ELL's as well as

members of the community who share their ethnicity and language. Knowing that the

barriers to ELL engagement and involvement go beyond simply "language" or "culture,"

K-12 administrators must not continue with current outreach practices and instead ensure

that the activities provided for ELL families are within their best interest by ensuring that

they are involved and maybe even be in charge of said practices (Parsons & Shim, 2019).

Policies and ESL Instruction

The academic progress of very child, including those learning English, will be

assessed in reading, science, history and math. ESLs will be assessed annually to measure

how well they are learning English, parents and teachers will know how they are

progressing and both the states and the schools will be held accountable for the results.

All students including ELLs should reach high standards by demonstrating proficiency in

English (Ladd, 2017).

As indicated in the English as a Second Language Manual published in 2018 and

the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), all ESL students must participate in the

Assessment Program (Department of Education, 2018). Including ELL in assessment

results ensures that students who are ESLs, including immigrant children and youth,

attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and

meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement

standards all students are expected to meet. ESSA requires all state assessments to

provide for the following: the reasonable adaptations and accommodations for students

with disabilities necessary to measure the students' academic achievement relative to

state academic content and state student academic achievement standards, and the

inclusion of ELL, who shall be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided

reasonable accommodations on assessments administered, including, to the extent

practicable, assessments in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data on

what students know and can do in academic content areas, until they have achieved

English language proficiency (Department of Education, 2018).

      A universal concern that ESL teachers have with administering the state

assessment to all ESL students at the end of the first school year that they are enrolled in

public school is that most ESL students have not yet received sufficient instruction to

become proficient in English. According to Barrow and Pithers (2016), students with

poor English skills are less likely to succeed in school and beyond. This is compounded

by the issue that policymakers and researchers do not agree on the most important goal of

education for ESL learners. In many contexts, improving classroom quality may be the

best way to help young English learners succeed (Barrow & Pithers, 2016).

Influence of Social Status and Culture on ELS Students

      The interviews incorporated discussion about: economic status, legal status,

college and financial aid eligibility, family view of education, family culture, school

attendance and work, and teenage pregnancy relative to ESL students. Teachers of ESL

students should be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of ESL students in order for them

to be successful. In order to fully embrace a commitment to education and the social and

cultural components of literacy development, an educator has to become fully aware of

the understandings that students are bringing with them based on their background

(Bikowski & Gui, 2017). This background information involves assessing their academic

skills as well as learning about their family, the cultural and social customs that are an

essential part of the child's life. When an interest is shown in a student's culture and

language it makes them feel you care and makes the student feel welcomed.

General Views of ESL Program

At the conclusion of the interviews, the participants were given the opportunity to make additional comments, share related ESL information or experiences. The responses below are general responses about different aspects of ESL instruction, theories, support, resources, programs, and other comments related to the ESL program. The findings of this part of the study are based on face-to-face interviews with 10 ESL high school teachers.

In the ESL teachers' view, the ESL program is a good foundation but more is needed for students to be successful. ESL students first complete a student profile form with the student's personal data, language background and educational history upon enrollment. The home language survey is also completed during this process. Next, they are assessed for English language proficiency and enrolled in the proper ESL classes.

ESL students' progress is monitored and assessed yearly with DOE mandated assessment known as the ACCESS test. The role of the ESL teacher consists of more than just teaching English language and academics. As the years past, ESL teacher's role has changed as they have to assist students with other issues that they face daily, which require them to be social workers, case managers and whatever else is needed to assist the students. Having to complete all these tasks equips students with necessary skills and academic knowledge for success. ESL teachers' views were supported with research literature indicated earlier in the study.

All of the participants have the same views of the ESL program. Furthermore, all of the participants described the program/instruction in similar ways. All of the

participants reported that not having a set curriculum in place for ESL students was a concern because it changed often. The participants indicated that the need for a district wide curriculum is needed so that it would not change every time someone new takes over the department. The high school offers the following classes for ESL students: inclusion classes, sheltered classes, self-contained, and content-based ESL classes. The ESL teachers believe that parental involvement plays an important role in an ESL students' education but is hard to obtain. The overall assessment of the ESL program was aligned when considering issues such as instruction, ESL students learning culture and policy.

Overall, all of the participants reported that the relationship between understanding the strategies for ESL students and the length of time in the ESL program is critical. Furthermore, all of the participants agreed that without proper strategies in place for ESL students, it takes much longer for them to learn the literature, meaning that when ESL students first enroll in the district it will take them longer than 4 years to graduate.

Teacher and student interactions are fundamental to learning outcomes (Tan et al., 2018). From the interview responses, it was evident that all of the ESL teachers supported the ESL program. Teachers' commitment to the success of ESL students was evidenced by their continuing efforts to research new ideas and ways to improve the learning experiences for ESL students. All of the participants adjusted classroom instruction to accommodate ESL learners. Also, all of the participants also provided extra support before and after school to ESL students that needed it.

Project Evaluation Plan

The development of a professional learning committee for ESL teachers is intended to help ESL teachers become familiar with the needs of ESL students and what current strategies and practices will motivate ESL students in the classroom. I will provide participants with a form to give feedback at the end of each session to get an understanding of the usefulness of the sessions and learn what could have been done differently. I will then create a guide and share with participants to provide continuous improvements based on the evaluation outcomes in order to make the most out of future sessions.

Project Implications

Implications for creating positive social change include PD opportunities for teachers to address the needs of ESL students. PD would help teachers with best practices and teaching strategies. The findings may assist teachers in helping students meet state standards. Possible project deliverables could include the implementation of a training PD program for ESL teachers on teaching strategies to help ESL students graduate from high school.

Implementation and Timetable

I will meet with school district administrators to discuss the implementation of this project study and its timeline. I will present to the administrators the implementation plan. I will also discuss the timeline for the implementation of the project study.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

I will have the primary responsibility to implement the project study at the study site. I will work collaboratively with all school district stakeholders such as senior administrators and school administrators to explain how this project study could be implemented at the school district. I will request access to relevant school resources for me to present the findings of this project study. I may need to request from senior district administrators to provide funds to support the presentation of the project findings to teachers and principals. The attendees of my presentation of the project study will be teachers of ESL students and school principals.

<div align="center">Project Evaluation</div>

I will implement the project study at the study site. The attendees will be teachers of ESL students and school principals. After I present the findings to the attendees, I will evaluate the project for decision-making processes to help teachers of ESL students and school principals to make decisions for the implementation of this project at all schools within the school district. For the project evaluation, I will conduct formative and summative evaluations.

<div align="center">Implications Including Social Change</div>

The project study contains findings that have implications for positive social change. Specifically, the project study may assist ESL teachers to address the needs of ESL students. The attendees will be benefit from the PD by learning practices and teaching strategies to help ESL students to improve their proficiency in English and graduate from high school. Thus, the findings may assist the attendees of the PD in

helping ESL students to meet state standards. In conclusion, the implementation of a training PD program for ESL teachers may help the attendees with new teaching strategies to help ESL students graduate from school.

This project study could be of assistance to school districts serving ESL students. For example, senior district administrators could implement the project study to increase the graduation rate of ESL students. Also, senior district administrators could implement PD for school leaders and ESL teachers to attend PD to learn strategies to help ESL students pass state tests. In conclusion, the attendees of the PD may develop teaching skills necessary to enhance ESL students' proficiency in English.

Summary

ESL students in the study site experienced lower than expected standardized testing scores according to the expectations of the DOE and achieve lower than expected AYP results per state, district, and school There is a need to closely analyze the achievement levels of ELL students in comparison to non-ELL students to improve the overall performance of the ELL population. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how teachers and administrators perceive the factors that might be contributing to the low standardized test scores.

A review of the progress of the ESL population was necessary in order to document their academic experience and to assess academic gaps, struggles, and deficiencies. The secondary intent was to explore proven and effective methods to assist students with improving their proficiency with decoding written text. A thorough understanding of best practices for the teachers who interact with ESL/ELL students on a

daily basis is necessary. The intent of this research was to understand what support

mechanisms could be developed to increase the success of ESL students when taking

standardized tests. Research must be conducted in order to discover opportunities to

reduce the number of ESL students who experience reading and testing deficiencies.

Adequate resources must be offered to ELL/ESL students who are experiencing problems

with the English language and with low reading and test scores. In Section 4, I describe a

reflection of personal learning of the doctoral study journey.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory, case study was to understand the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students and the challenges that hinder their progress. The conceptual framework was Gagne's conditions of learning theory, which is used to assess whether test results are an indication of lack of preparation for future academic and career success. I analyzed the participant interview data using Hatch's nine-step typological process. The findings included that ESL teachers provide ESL students with the appropriate strategies and supports for students to be successful in the classroom. ESL teachers support students by implementing curriculum designs and using best teaching practices and strategies for ESL students to increase proficiency in literacy. The implications for positive social change include strengthening ESL students' skills and better preparing them to be successful in the classroom by implementing appropriate teaching strategies to develop the curriculum for ESL students. In this section, I provide a reflection of the doctoral journey and suggestions for future research.

Project Strengths

The strength of this project lies in the fact that this program consists of practices and strategies arising from the teaching and learning experiences of ESL teachers and students as collected in this study. Therefore, the program was designed to improve the practice of ESL teaching to promote student learning. The program will help provide PD for ESL teachers so they receive academic support and enhance their instructional skills. This project provides the ESL department with a strategic approach to authorize PD for ESL teachers. Once the PD takes place, it will need to be formalized with principals,

superintendents, ESL coordinators, and teachers. Lastly, the target of this specific

program is limited to ESL teachers, but this program could serve as a model to be

implemented by teachers in other academic departments.

The fact that the ESL program at the study site has a limited number of teachers

and they change from year to year due to staff turnovers is a limitation of this project.

ESL teachers at the study site are not offered much PD, making their participation in the

program an issue. My goal with this project was to address this problem with the head of

the ESL department and propose that ESL teachers get some type of monetary incentive

to attend the workshops. As suggested by Pendleton and Robinson (2017), financial

compensation is an incentive in many workplaces to meet required tasks, such as PD

hours. An example could be a district where ESL teachers are offered a salary increase

for every 60 hours of PD completed (Pendleton & Robinson, 2017).

Recommendations for the Remediation of Limitations

The findings of this study and my further recommendations for ESL instructional

support the idea that educational stakeholders have a strong desire and will to find

multiple ways of ensuring that ESL students receive quality instruction. Such

commitment to education requires on-going PD for all ESL teachers in the profession.

The literature review and the study findings provided me with guiding information to

develop a PD with best ESL practices and strategies to be implemented with ESL

students. ESL teachers will have a greater chance of meeting the expectations of ESL

students if they have the support to understand the complexity of the needs of the

population they teach.

To improve the chance of successfully implementing this program, the district would be required to make an investment in the necessary resources, create a culture of open communication among all members involved in the implementation of this program, and provide a supportive environment. Current research and the results of this study show that having ESL teachers that meet the needs of ESL students would increase students' English proficiency. Therefore, stakeholders could encourage the creation and development of opportunities for teachers' learning and academic growth as well as support the development of learning communities among ESL teachers across the district.

Scholarship

During this journey, I have learned that research is a long, complex, and repetitive process. I noticed that there is a big difference between the published research articles I have read and the project study that I conducted. As a practitioner, I found the process tedious. The concepts, such as the examination of self as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer; data collection; gaining access to participants; and data analysis had to be explained over and over again. I had to search databases utilizing different key words and phrases to find my articles. However, I found that I can complete any academic task that I want to accomplish when I am focused on it. Although I can complete any academic task that I want to accomplish, being a scholar is not as rewarding as I thought it would be because of the mixed emotions I felt. I also discovered that teachers are in this profession because they are passionate about teaching and learning, but the monetary benefit is little and slow to show up. As a scholar, I feel that in all professions, there is some type of challenge, so why not stay where you are passionate about what you do and

are getting paid for your higher degrees and receiving opportunities to pay off your student loans.

Project Development and Evaluation

The development of this project gave me the opportunity to strengthen my research skills. I also feel that I now have a better grasp of writing a literature review. Conducting interviews gave me a chance to learn more about participants and practice techniques for gathering qualitative data. I feel that I have developed the initial skills necessary to engage in conducting formal research for future jobs that would consist of conducting research.

Leadership and Change

I have always seen myself as a leader, and this project study confirmed it. Previous jobs I have held required me to lead and implement change. This project study journey has strengthened those skills and better prepared me to take on leadership roles at my school and in my community. As a practitioner, I learned that I can accomplish any task that I set my mind to. I enjoyed conducting research, and I discovered that I have the ability to engage participants. I also learned that I have a liking for research, and this could be something to look into as a possible future career.

English language immersion programs in public schools are beneficial to communities where a proportionate number of residents have a different primary language (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017). These programs help ELL students thrive in the United States as they become adults and improve their cognitive and communication skills. Proficiency in the English language is beneficial to helping support students'

academic success that leads to the pathway of continuing education, applying for jobs, managing financial scenarios, and other circumstances where command of the English language is important. ESL programs have the potential to provide ELL students with academic achievement and opportunities similar to those experienced by native, English-speaking students. Unfortunately, all ESL programs are not created equal, and they do not always have standardized curriculum to teach students language proficiency and the social components of language. The data collected in this study clearly demonstrates that there is significant need for these programs to have fully developed and consistent curricula in public schools in the study site. Despite the intricacy of these issues, establishing a collective commitment to prioritize closing these gaps is necessary to ensure optimal educational opportunities for all students. I hope that the research I have presented contributes to the planning of today's academic programs by highlighting the need for a focus on the effectiveness and equity of ESL programs within in the local state and at national level.

The concern for the robustness of ESL education in the local school district under study was the motivating factor to this examination of the perceptions of ESL teachers who work closely with ELL students at local high school. In this study, I sought to directly gather ESL teachers' perceptions of the greatest challenges faced and needs for improving the delivery of instruction to their ELL students. I found that the greatest challenges involved the absence of standardized curriculum and the additional socio-financial duties associated with the job. Teachers would benefit from routine, program-

specific PD to ensure that they acquire the newest, evidence-based tools, techniques, and practices.

The multifaceted English language learning ecology in today's classrooms has resulted in environments that are simpler for some students to learn the English language and more difficult for others (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017). There are content development techniques and classroom management approaches that can be used as key strategies to enhance the learning outcomes among ELL students and likely lead to better assessment outcomes when used in a standardized way (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017). Some of these strategies include structuring classrooms productively, integrating relevant challenging content, and empowering students to take accountability for learning (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017). Furthermore, it is important to be mindful that the challenge of learning a second language while simultaneously managing other extenuating stressors could potentially be depicted in assessment results and would benefit from further study.

The increasing numbers of ELL students and the consistent achievement gap between this group and native English speakers signifies a necessary shift in pedagogical approaches to increase learning outcomes among ELL students. Shifting the current curriculum paradigm and the English-centered instruction policies that drive most public schools can include small changes that have proven to help ELL students, including incorporating relevant and challenging content. Additionally, new approaches to PD, including micro-credentialing, can help teachers facilitate these learning environments.

Scholarship and Practitioner

I appreciated the support of my doctoral study committee. As a scholar, I learned how to collect and analyze data from interviews with the participants and conduct a literature review. I also learned how to obtain IRB approval, develop an interview protocol, and use a conceptual framework and the literature review to explain the findings of a project study.

As a practitioner, I learned about the significance of the conceptual framework and research-based best teaching practices for improving ESL student's learning. Furthermore, as a practitioner, I learned how the content of this project study may be used to assist the program attendees who are school leaders and ESL teachers. The project outcome, which is a PD, may help school leaders and ESL teachers by teaching them strategies and best practices to better support ESL students.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This project study contains findings that have implications for positive social change. Specifically, the project study may assist ESL teachers to address the needs of ESL students. Implementation of the project PD program for ESL teachers may help the attendees learn new teaching strategies to help ESL students graduate from school, meet state standards, and enhance their proficiency in English. This project study could also be of assistance to other school districts serving ESL students. For example, senior district administrators could implement the PD for school leaders and ESL teachers to learn strategies to help ESL students pass state tests and increase their graduation rate.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Additional research should be conducted comparing existing ESL curricula and how they impact assessment results. Researchers may examine the difference in outcomes between ESL students who have attended one school versus multiple schools. To fully understand the significance of the evident achievement gaps, the researcher should also be able to analyze whether there is a distinction in achievement with ESL students who are only children, have siblings for support, and proficiency of the parents or guardians. Future research should also incorporate educational data mining to grant clarification to researchers who want to further investigate the nature of the challenges to teaching ESL class and for ELL students learning on a broader scale.

ELL students were not examined individually by culture or country of origin in this study and is an area for future study. Furthermore, the assessments that ELL students take are designed for native-English speakers and were not developed with a mechanism for measuring what ELL students know and can accomplish year over year. Monitoring ESL students' performance long-term could also be valuable research. This can be done through a carefully designed longitudinal data systems that could tract a student cohort student to understand progress in language acquisition between ELL students who remain in the ESL program for the duration of their secondary academic career and those who promote out of the program prior to graduation.

Lastly, this study examined high school students. Future studies should evaluate the structure and consistency of ESL programs at the elementary and middle school level. The rationale is that adjusting the ESL program at the elementary and middle school level

may reveal considerable gains on WIDA/ ACCESS and state tests for ELL students at the high school levels.

Conclusion

Finding multiple solutions to support ESL teachers and students in high school education continues to be a challenge. However as stated by Kennedy (2016), PD improves teaching practices and, as a result, students learn. The findings of this study support the idea that educational leaders in charge have the commitment of finding ways of ensuring that faculty is educationally supported and that teachers teach at their highest potential. This commitment requires purposeful ongoing professional support for teachers. The findings in the literature review for this project provide guiding information on how to create and deliver PD that meet the need of each teacher.

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Appendix A: The Project

Understanding the Strategies English as a Second Language Teachers Use to Teach Students

Unika Felton
October 2020
Doctor of Education
Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning
Final Oral Defense

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Summary of Proposal

- The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to understand the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students and the challenges that hinder their progress. The conceptual framework was Gagne's conditions of learning theory, which assesses whether these test results are an indication of lack of preparation for future academic and career success. The research questions elicited strategies ESL teachers use to teach EL students and the challenges that hinder the progress of these students. Data collection consisted of 10 unstructured interviews and five classroom observations, using purposive sampling, in Grades 9 through 12 in the local school district. The selection criteria were both male and female adult teachers who teach ESL students on a daily basis, and have the ability to write and communicate ideas clearly in English and other languages.

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Research Questions

The research questions that guided this qualitative exploratory case study are:

RQ1: What do teachers perceive are the factors that might be contributing to low standardized test scores by ESL students?

RQ2: What do teachers perceive are strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students?

RQ3: What do teachers perceive are the challenges that teachers face which might hinder the progress of ESL students?

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Participants/Sample Size

- An urban high school in the metropolitan area of southern United States was the setting for this study.

- The school district serves the city as well as unincorporated areas of the county and is the largest school district in the state with over 149,000 students in Grades K-12.

- The local high school has 60 teachers of which 10 are ESL teachers.

- The local high school also has three administrators and 10 support staff.

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Participants/Sample Size

- Purposeful sampling was used to explore and identify key informants who have specific knowledge about the topic being investigated
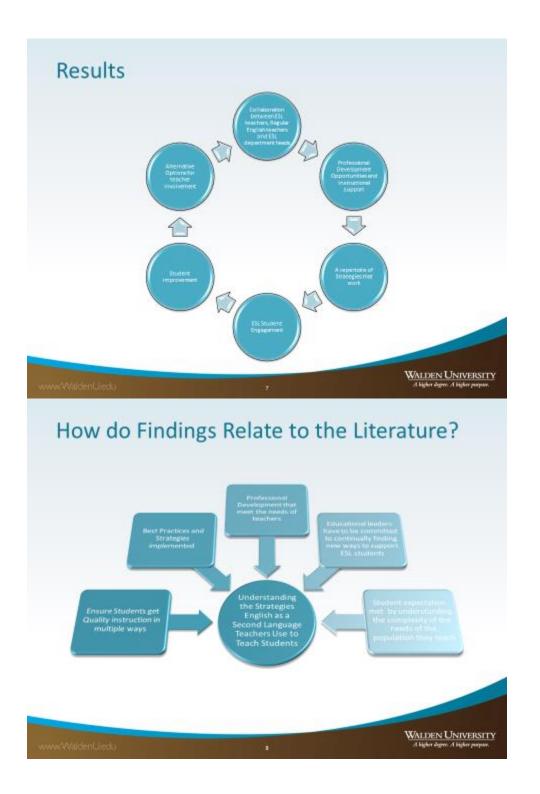- The participant selection criteria was as follows:

ESL teachers who interact with ESL students on a daily basis;

The teachers have been teaching at the research site for at least 2 years; and

The teachers are state certified.

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Emerging Themes

Theme	Explanation of Theme
ESL Teacher Role	How ESL teachers view ESL students in regular classrooms
English Proficiency assessment and monitoring	Process and strategies used for assessments and monitoring of English proficiency for ESL students
ESL programs and instruction for ESL students	Methods of instruction to ESL students
Learning ability effects on Second Language Acquisition (SLA)	ESL teachers view of learning abilities and its role when learning a second language
Parental involvement and ESL student success	Existing parental involvement and understanding its connection to ESL student success
Policies and ESL instruction	Policies related to ESL academics and implications for ESL programs
Influence of social status and culture on ESL students	Understanding the role socioeconomic status plays on ESL student learning
General views of ESL program	General views ESL teachers have towards the ESL program that include district support, resources, instruction, theories and other comments related to ESL program.

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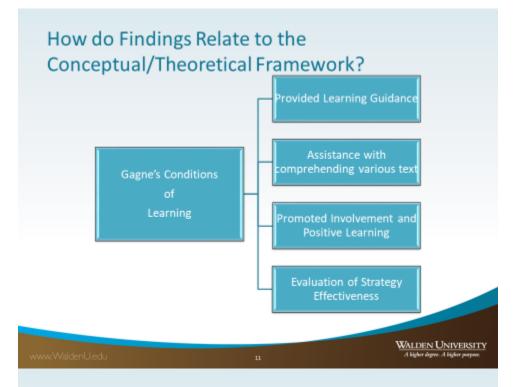
How do Findings Relate to the Literature?

The findings of this study and further recommendations for ESL instructional support the idea that educational stakeholders have a strong desire and will to find multiple ways of ensuring that ESL students receive quality instruction. Such commitment to education requires on-going professional development to all ESL teachers in the profession. The literature review and the study findings provide guiding information of best ESL practices and strategies to be implemented with ESL students. It also provides guided information on how to create and deliver professional development that meet the need of each teacher. ESL teachers will have a greater chance of meeting the expectations of ESL students if they have the support to understand the complexity of the needs of the population they teach.

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How do Findings Relate to the Literature?

Finding multiple solutions to support ESL teachers and students in high school education continues to be a challenge. However as stated by Kennedy (2016), professional development improves teaching practices and, as a result, students learn. The findings of this study support the idea that educational leaders in charge have the commitment of finding ways of ensuring that faculty is educationally supported and that teachers teach at their highest potential. This commitment requires purposeful ongoing professional support for teachers.

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How do Findings Relate to the Conceptual/Theoretical Framework?

Gagne's Conditions of Learning

- Provided Learning Guidance
- Assistance with comprehending various text
- Promoted Involvement and Positive Learning
- Evaluation of Strategy Effectiveness

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How do Findings Relate to the Conceptual/Theoretical Framework?

In order to improve the chance of success to implement this program the district would require an investment in the necessary resources, create a culture of open communication among all members involved in implementing this program and provide a supportive environment. Providing ESL teachers with professional development would thrive within the school and the district educational funding allocations. Current research and the results of my own case study show that having ESL teachers that meet the needs of ESL students would increase students' English proficiency. Therefore, stakeholders could encourage the creation and development of opportunities for learning and academic growth, and encourage and support the development of learning communities among ESL teachers across the district.

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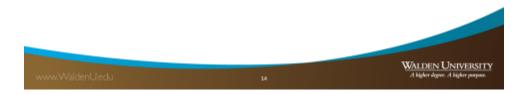*A higher degree. A higher purpose.*

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by the experiences of the ESL teachers and the sample representing only ESL teachers from just one school. The scope of this project study is one high school and the findings do not apply to other high schools within the school district, which binds this study.

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Limitations of the Study

The limitation of this project is primarily established in the fact that the ESL program has a limited number of teachers and they change from year to year due to staff turnovers. As ESL teachers are not offered a lot of professional development, thus making participation an issue.

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Recommendations for Future Research

The strength of this project is that the implementation of this program will consist of practices and strategies arising from the teaching and learning experiences of ESL teachers and students as collected in this study. Therefore, the program will be designed to improve the practice of ESL teaching to promote student learning. The program will help provide professional development for ESL teachers with a consistent mean to receive academic support and enhance their instructional skills. This project provides the ESL department with a strategic approach to authorize professional development for ESL teachers. Once professional development takes place, it will need to be formalized with principals, superintendents and ESL coordinators and teachers. Lastly, the target of this program is limited to ESL teachers but this program could serve as a model to be implemented by teachers in other academic departments

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Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study and further recommendations for ESL instructional support the idea that educational stakeholders have a strong desire and will to find multiple ways of ensuring that ESL students receive quality instruction. Such commitment to education requires on-going professional development to all ESL teachers in the profession. The literature review and the study findings provide guiding information of best ESL practices and strategies to be implemented with ESL students. ESL teachers will have a greater chance of meeting the expectations of ESL students if they have the support to understand the complexity of the needs of the population they teach.

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Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should evaluate the structure and consistency of ESL programs at the elementary and middle school level. The rationale is that adjusting the ESL program at the elementary and middle school level may reveal considerable gains on WIDA/ ACCESS and TCAP tests for ELL students at the high school levels.

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Social Change Implications

Implications for creating positive social change include professional development (PD) opportunities for teachers to address the needs of ESL students. PD would help teachers with best practices and teaching strategies. The findings may assist teachers in helping students meet state standards. Possible project deliverables could include the implementation of a training PD program for ESL teachers on teaching strategies to help ESL students graduate from high school.

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Conclusions

Education is important and it gives us knowledge and opportunities to change for the better. Lacking the proper strategies and resources, makes it harder for ESL students to learn. It is important to recognize and identify effective strategies to offer support to those students. It is also important to offer support for the educators who work with these students on a daily basis. Finding multiple solutions to support ESL teachers and students in high school education continues to be a challenge. However, if educators, parents and communities work together to compile effective strategies and resources, improvements will be shown. Developing professional learning committees for ESL teachers that help ESL teachers become familiar with the needs of ESL students and what current strategies and practices will motivate ESL students in the classroom are ongoing processes to ensure students continue to be successful. By focusing on the strategies, professional learning committees, supports and services recommended in this project for understanding strategies used to teach ESL students, school districts have the opportunity to ensure successful outcomes for ESL students and their school community.

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Acknowledgements

- A special thanks to my committee members who assist me with this project.

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Appendix A- The Project

Introduction

This qualitative case study explored how teachers and administrators perceive the factors that might contribute to low standardized test scores, how they perceive the strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students, and how they perceive the challenges that teachers and administrators face which might hinder the progress of ESL students in the Shelby County School District in Memphis, TN. The responses showed that the level of success achieved by ESL students are on standardized test and in the classroom depends on the strategies and methods teachers implement, support in primary classroom, training provided to ESL teachers, parental involvement, and learning abilities of ESL students. An effort was made to seek the ESL teacher's view of ESL instruction failures and successes. Information was gathered through one-on-one interviews with ESL teachers, English teachers, as well as descriptive student data provided to the school by the district and is accessible to the public.

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The first research question for this study "What do teachers perceive are the factors that might be contributing to low standardized test scores by ESL students?" The findings interpreted that language deficiencies, socioeconomic circumstances are the factors that contribute to low test scores and the success of ESL students.

Comparing the responses from teachers who teach ESL students on a daily basis. Most of the responses were the same. The same reasons were identified by administrators. The only difference with one was that low parental participation was a factor that led to ESL students not doing well which still lead to language deficiencies and socioeconomic issues.

The identified reasons many ESL students suffered could be interpreted differently, but they reflect themes that are common. Teachers stated students felt content was hard to understand due to language barriers being in English which is not their primary language. This knowledge was important because of the need to understand these factors to build successful strategies.

When focused on the second research question "What do teachers perceive are data strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students?" Through the data, the conclusions are that the following strategies have a significant impact on the success of students in the classroom and long term success:

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- Learning academic vocabulary which teach them how to read the questions for clarity and find answers
- Natural Communication which provides opportunities for students to improve memory
- Annotated Questions and text ensures they understand what is happening in the text after they read it.
- Test taking skills such as time management that helps eliminate and make references.
- Better communication between parents, school, teachers
- Visual aids
- ACE Model

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Finally, the third research question "what do teachers perceive are the challenges that teachers an administrators face which might hinder the progress of ESL students", concluded that teachers and administrators all agree that making changes to the district ESL program to ensure success for ESL students. Those changes include: (a) collaboration between administrators, ESL teachers, regular classroom teachers and ESL department leaders, (b) set curriculum for ESL students, (c) extra support before and after school,(d) using a variety of strategies.

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If a successful ESL curriculum for ESL students is developed with a variety of strategies that will significantly increase ESL students language proficiency and test scores. When the language barriers improve students are more successful in school and in their everyday lives. When students language is improved this in return provides an opportunity for parents language barriers to be improved. This will also increase parental support.

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Appendix A- The Project

Rationale

The majority of ESL students achieve lower standardized test scores compared to students of other demographics in the SCS District Between the years of 2013-2015 there were none of the ESL students at Kingsbury High School scored in the proficient category, which is the target location for this study. The goal for the SCS district, per mandates established by the TDOE, is for an increasing number of students to move toward proficiency and beyond each year. Since 2011, the annual yearly progress within SCS for ESL students has shown a steady decline (Table 1). Because of this consistent decline in performance of ESL students, it is imperative that current strategies are explored.

Tennessee Diploma Project (2014) reported that all high school students in the state must complete 22 credits to graduate on state mandated end of course (EOC) exams. The 2009 TDP requirements would align the end of course test with the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). This modification requires student performance on the EOC tests to be factored into their semester grades, with a percentage effect on their final grades in their core classes. In the instance that a student is already performing at below proficient levels in a core class and scores below proficient on the EOC exam, it is possible that the student could fail the class and not earn a diploma (Tennessee Department of Education, 2014).

Developing competent and fair testing mechanisms has not only been a problem within the state of Tennessee; concerns have increased nationally over the last 20 years amid national and state test score declines, unflattering international achievement comparisons, failure of funding increases to produce discernible results, high school dropout rates, and a perception that school and work are insufficiently closely aligned (NIFDI, 2015).

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Appendix A- The Project

Project Description

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The success of this project will primarily depend on the support provided by the school district and ESL department personnel to provide and accommodate time and space for program implementation. The ESL department chair will make a schedule to accommodate ESL teachers schedules so that ESL teachers who volunteer to help develop the program. Additional support can be offered as well through the districts learning portal.

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Potential Barriers

As Quintelier et al. (2020) mentioned the importance of taking into account teachers willingness to participate, I foresee as a major barrier to ESL teachers to take additional time to meet to setup the foundations of the program for professional development considering that they are full time faculty, have families and some are enrolled in college courses in the evening. As Mundschenk and Fuchs (2016) explained, professional learning committees would impact to the successful implementation of any school program. I particularly consider that if the school district provides compensation for their time and attendance, lack of participation would be reduced to a minimum. Another potential barrier could be the districts lack funds to pay outside personnel to conduct professional development once it becomes a part of the program. I will look for low cost and possible workshops that are free if funds become an issue. Alternatively, the professional development could be offered online to save on other expenses.

In spite of the fact that some teachers may feel they do not need to participate in the program implementation for professional development because they might feel that their teaching methods are up to date, I, as the implementer, will explain the benefits of formally establishing professional development as a mean of support for ESL teachers. Since the finding of this study will be previously shared with ESL teachers, I expect little unwillingness to participate. Nevertheless, I will ensure that each teacher understands the benefit of creating a program to help old and new ESL teachers current on trends to motivate ESL students in the classroom.

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Project Evaluation Plan

The development of a professional learning Committee for ESL teachers is intended to help ESL teachers become familiar with the needs of ESL students and what current strategies and practices will motivate ESL students in the classroom. I will provide participants with a form to give feedback at the end of each session to get an understanding of the usefulness of the sessions and learn what could have been done differently. I will then create a guide and share with participants to provide continuous improvements based on the evaluation outcomes in order to make the most out of future sessions.

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Project Implications

Implications for creating positive social change include professional development (PD) opportunities for teachers to address the needs of ESL students. PD would help teachers with best practices and teaching strategies. The findings may assist teachers in helping students meet state standards. Possible project deliverables could include the implementation of a training PD program for ESL teachers on teaching strategies to help ESL students graduate from high school.

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Appendix A- The Project

Summary

ESL students in the SCS District of Memphis experience lower than expected standardized testing scores according to the expectations of the TDOE (Tennessee Department of Education, 2014) and achieve lower than expected AYP results per state, district, and school There is a need to closely analyze the achievement levels of ELL students in comparison to non-ELL students to improve the overall performance of the ELL population. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how teachers and administrators perceive the factors that might be contributing to the low standardized test scores.

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A review of the progress of the ESL population was necessary in order to document their academic experience and to assess academic gaps, struggles, and deficiencies. The secondary intent was to explore proven and effective methods to assist students with improving their proficiency with decoding written text. A thorough understanding of best practices for the teachers that interact with ESL/ELL students on a daily basis is was necessary. The intent of this research was to understand what support mechanisms could be developed to increase the success of ESL students when taking standardized tests. Research must be conducted in order to discover opportunities to reduce the number of ESL students who experience reading and testing deficiencies. Adequate resources must be offered to ELL/ESL students who are experiencing problems with the English language and with low reading and test scores. In Section 2, the research methodology is presented.

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

RQ1: What do teachers perceive are the factors that might be contributing to low standardized test scores by ESL students**?**

Interview Question 1: How do you feel about ESL students being placed in regular classrooms?

Interview Question 2: How much training or professional development has been provided to you to with ESL learners?

Interview Question 3: What do you think of learning abilities of ESL learners?

Interview Question 4: How might parental involvement contribute Do you believe the curriculum is suitable to instruct ESL learners?

Interview Question 5: What instructional methods/strategies do you feel provides a base for successful navigation of the standardized test?

Interview Question 6: Why are ESL learners failing to reach successful language acquisition levels as measured by standard-based assessment?

RQ2: What do teachers perceive are strategies ESL teachers use to teach ESL students?

Interview Question 1: How do you adjust your classroom instruction to accommodate your ESL learners?

Interview Question 2: How do you assist ESL students who struggle with certain skills or strategies?

Interview Question 3: How do you help ESL students feel comfortable in a mainstream classroom?

Interview Question 4: What strategies do you believe is most effective with teaching ESL students?

RQ3: What do teachers perceive are the challenges that teachers and administrators face which might hinder the progress of ESL students?

Interview Question 1: How can instruction be differentiated for ESL students?

Interview Question 2: How do you feel about the resources provided to support ESL students?

Interview Question 3: How does your district support teachers with ESL learners?

Interview Question 4: How does your district support parents of ESL learners?